

IMAGINATION  
AND RELIGION

By *CANON LINDSAT DEWAR* and  
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A MANUAL OF  
PASTORAL PSYCHOLOGY

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# IMAGINATION AND RELIGION

BY  
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## P R E F A C E

THERE are few subjects more fascinating than the study of imagination ; for each one of us is largely what imagination makes him. We must beware of the common mistake of contrasting imagination with ' reality '. This blunder is responsible for many troubles. Unless we are crass materialists, we must hold that imagination is as much a part of reality as is a tree or a stone. Indeed, it is more ' real ', if it comes to that. Hence an imaginary pain or an imaginary illness is a ' real ' illness. If the pain is not organically conditioned it arises from a diseased mind, which is at least as much a part of reality as a diseased mouth. If I think that I have a pain, then I have a pain. We must avoid the confused thinking expressed in the well-known limerick :

There was a faith-healer of Deal  
Who said, Although pain isn't real,  
When I sit on a pin,  
And it punctures my skin,  
I dislike what I think that I feel.

In spite of the central place which imagination occupies in human life, however, its importance has been strangely overlooked by psychologists. There is, for example, in existence no comprehensive standard work on imagination. Nor is there any uniform usage among psychologists as to the precise meaning of the term. Some employ it to denote only the anticipatory power of thought ; others use it to refer to the general capacity for experiencing mental

imagery, whether relating to past, present, or future. This wider usage seems to me to be the more satisfactory, and I have, therefore, adopted it. In this book an attempt is made to show the immense influence which imagination has upon human life in general and upon religion in particular.

At one time I contemplated the inclusion, in the Pastoral section of the book, of a chapter on Imagination in dealing with individuals. However, as I am hoping to write a book before very long on *The Priest as Spiritual Physician*, I decided to leave the matter over for more adequate treatment than it could have well received in such a chapter.

I desire to express my gratitude to the Rev. Dr. G. J. Jordan, who read the proof and who assisted me by several valuable suggestions ; also to Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton Ltd. and to Messrs. Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd. for their kind permission to make the quotations from Dr. Moffatt's translation of the Old Testament and from the English edition of *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* respectively.

L. D.

*PART I*  
PSYCHOLOGICAL

## CHAPTER I

### WHAT IMAGINATION IS

IN the case of the lower animals the proverb, ' Out of sight out of mind,' is largely true. It is not so with man. He has an enormously increased power of imagination which enables him to see in his mind's eye the whole realm of experience ; it enables him to recall the past, and, above all, it enables him, by anticipating the future, to perceive with the inward eye things that are yet to be.

Imagination, however, is not confined simply to ' seeing,' as the popular usage of the term suggests. We may adopt Professor McDougall's definition and say that imagination is the capacity or function of thinking of absent or remote objects. Imagination may, therefore, operate in terms of *any* of the five senses, and not by means of sight alone. In some persons, for instance, auditory imagery is very vivid. Thus the young Mozart is said to have gone to the Sistine Chapel at Rome and, having heard a Mass played through once, to have returned home and written it out from memory. He then went back and heard it again, in order to make quite sure that he had made no mistakes. All persons with musical gifts possess in some degree this power of hearing in imagination. In some persons what is called kinæsthetic imagery is predominant. In this instance the subject inwardly perceives in terms of movement. This is the case with dancers and athletes of all kinds. It also plays a large part in the constitution of musical ability.<sup>1</sup> In

<sup>1</sup> See page 108.

other persons tactile imagery is predominant. They inwardly 'feel' the objects of experience. Some of the adjectives which are in common use illustrate this fact. For instance, we speak of a 'hard-headed' business man. The force of this epithet is due to the fact that it appeals to our tactile imagination. Again, we speak of an unpleasant kind of person as being 'slimy.' This term also derives its force from the tactile imagination. In a few persons olfactory (or smell) imagery is predominant. It is said that the novelist Zola could, with his eyes shut, distinguish every city in Europe by its smell. In the case of the lower animals this olfactory imagery seems in many cases to be the most important. In man, however, it has for some reason largely atrophied. Psychologists frequently distinguish a sixth kind of imagery which they call verbal, or imagining in terms of words. This, however, is not strictly speaking a separate variety, but rather a combination of seeing and hearing and, it may be, of kinæsthetic imagery. In some persons it is very strongly visual. Francis Galton, for instance, cites the case of a politician who wrote out his speeches and then read them off the back of his mind as from a manuscript. He did this so vividly that even the erasures and mistakes in his manuscript appeared before his mind's eye, insomuch that at times they actually impeded the course of the speech.<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt, however, that the most important variety of imagination among human beings is visual. It is this fact which has caused the word 'imagination' to be confined popularly to visual imagery. How fundamental this is in man is revealed by various sets of evidence. There is, first of all, the evidence of primitive peoples. This suggests that originally all men were visiles. Dr. Rivers, for

<sup>1</sup> See F. Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty*.

example, describes how he gained on Murray Island his first experience of a native court.

“An old woman gave a vigorous and animated account of her experience in relation to the case. As she gave her evidence she looked first in one direction and then in another with a keenness and directness that showed beyond doubt that every detail of the occurrences she was describing was being enacted before her eyes. I have never seen a European show by his or her demeanour with any approach to the behaviour of this old woman how closely knowledge and memory depend on sensory imagery. I suggest therefore that, as in the dream, the need for expressing by means of sensory imagery furnishes the chief motive for the prominence of the dramatic quality of primitive culture. People who have to rely upon imagery in order to remember, will necessarily put their experience into such concrete and imaged form as will enable it to be grasped and held.”<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, there is the evidence of dreams. Everybody knows how vivid is the pictorial imagery of dreams. Other forms of imagery, indeed, occur there also. In our dreams we hear sounds, and smell and taste and touch things just as we do in waking life. Probably most people, however, would agree that it is the seeing element in experience which is most characteristic of the dream state. This subject has, indeed, not yet been fully investigated scientifically, but it is tolerably certain that the result of such an investigation would be to prove that visual imagery is the most predominant variety in dreams. Since dreams hark back to an earlier stage of man's mental life, this points to the fact that originally man was predominantly visile in imagination.

<sup>1</sup> W. H. R. Rivers, *Dreams and Primitive Culture*. Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, vol. iv, p. 394.

Thirdly, there is the evidence of child study. All very young children experience vivid visual imagery. This is one reason for little children's lies. They have not yet learnt to distinguish between fancy and fact. This capacity is not acquired until the child is perhaps six or seven years old. Savages are similar in this respect. Moreover, both infants and savages are unable to distinguish with certainty between dreams and waking life. Indeed, there are times in the experience of all of us when, confronted by some recollection, we have to pause and think carefully before we ourselves can make this distinction.

The evidence shows, however, that this capacity for experiencing visual imagery is damaged, and often completely destroyed, by abstract thinking. It is interesting to trace the influence of abstract thought upon imagination in the drawings of children. Small children, it has been observed, frequently draw most accurately, because they draw as they perceive and as they imagine. But when in course of time the capacity for thinking in abstract, conceptual terms develops, the naïve power of perception is often lost. For example, instead of seeing a horse as it really is, they 'schematise' it as a complex of certain parts—the four legs, the head, the tail, and so forth. Consequently when they come to make a drawing of a horse, instead of drawing what they actually perceive, children frequently put on paper their concepts—first the head and the body, then the four legs, and then the tail. The result, as we all know, is utterly unlike a horse. It represents not what is seen, but what has been conceptually grasped as the child has learnt to distinguish the different elements in the horse's anatomy. The more that conceptual thought is practised, the more the power of visualising is apt to be lost. Consequently

philosophers and mathematicians, whose thinking is predominantly conducted in abstract terms, may become almost entirely devoid of the power of visible imagery. Poets, on the other hand, possess it most vividly. It is, indeed, this which enables them to be poets, because poetry is nothing but the putting into words of vivid imaginations, whether visual, auditory, or any other. So much is this the case that some of the great poets have even been unable to distinguish between their own imaginations and reality. Thus, for example, it was with the poet Shelley.

“At no period of his life was he wholly free from visions which had the reality of facts. Sometimes they occurred in sleep, and were prolonged with painful vividness into his waking moments. Sometimes they seemed to grow out of his intense meditation, or to present themselves before his eyes as the projection of a powerful inner impression. All his sensations were abnormally acute and his ever-active imagination confused the borderlands of the actual and the visionary.”<sup>1</sup>

There is, however, a further point of great importance to be borne in mind concerning imagination. It leads almost inevitably to action, whereas abstract thinking has no such effect. On the contrary, it suspends action. The scholar, who is accustomed to weighing evidence and thinking in abstract terms, often finds it difficult to come to a definite conclusion or to make up his mind to commit himself to a particular line of action in respect of his special subject. His form of activity is accurately described as ‘sitting on the fence.’ But when his imagination is suddenly stirred without opportunity for reflection, action swiftly follows. This latter point was well illustrated by Mr. G. K. Chesterton in his story of the philosopher who proclaimed

<sup>1</sup> *Shelley*, by J. A. Symonds, p. 62.

himself to be a pessimist. In his lectures he used to maintain that life was not worth living : but when one day a student appeared in the quadrangle and shot him through his tall hat, his philosophy had no influence upon his conduct. His imagination was stirred, and he ran for his life. This principle holds true of all kinds of imagery, visual, auditory, kinæsthetic, and the rest. That is why a person who has a tune running in his head can find no satisfaction until he sings it out. Shakespeare pointed to this principle when he said, "How oft the sight to do ill deeds makes ill deeds done."

What is the reason for this power of the imagination ? The answer seems to be that imagination belongs to the lower or instinctive levels of the mind. At this level, stimulus is followed immediately by response because the inhibiting power of conscious judgment and volition is absent.<sup>1</sup> This point is well illustrated by the well-known phenomena of post-hypnotic suggestion. Here the patient carries out unquestioningly any injunction which has been planted in his mind by the hypnotist. For example, he is told in hypnosis that as soon as he wakes he will open the window. This he straightway proceeds to do as soon as he passes from the hypnotic trance. He is compelled to do so by an inward compulsion. He sees in his mind's eye a picture of himself opening the window. He does not argue the pros and cons, but simply performs the action. The reason for this is that when the idea of opening the window was planted in his mind by the hypnotist, it was in no wise questioned by the critical reason, which, under hypnosis, is dormant. Consequently it gained complete control of his imagination. As a result the action followed in due course without let or hindrance. In like manner, whenever imagination is not

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, "Why Imagination leads to Action."

negatively influenced by the critical reason, it will lead to the appropriate action. This holds good of all varieties of mental imagery but especially (in the case of the average person) of visual imagery.

Another illustration of this point is afforded by the phenomena of crowd psychology. It has long been observed how tremendously powerful is any appeal to the imagination of the crowd. Every experienced speaker is aware of this. But in the case of the crowd mind we are once more at the instinctive level. As Plato realized, the crowd is never a philosopher. "Inaccessible to fine distinctions, it sees things as a whole, and is blind to their intermediate phases."<sup>1</sup> "In a collective mind the intellectual aptitudes of the individual, and in consequence their individuality, are weakened. The heterogeneous is swamped by the homogeneous and the unconscious qualities obtain the upper hand."<sup>2</sup> Consequently panic may easily seize a crowd and lead it to sudden and immensely powerful action. Once an image seizes the imagination of the crowd, appropriate action inevitably follows. Le Bon cites a good instance of this—the murder of M. de Lavery, the Governor of the Bastille during the French Revolution.

"After the taking of the fortress the Governor, surrounded by a very excited crowd, was dealt blows from every direction. It was proposed to hang him, to cut off his head, to tie him to a horse's tail. While struggling, he accidentally kicked one of those present. Someone proposed, and his suggestion was at once received with acclamation by the crowd, that the individual who had been kicked should cut the Governor's throat. This he proceeded to do."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Crowd*, by G. le Bon, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 104.

Herein is the reason why the crowd mind is notoriously so unjust, and liable to be prejudiced and unfair in its judgment. Once it gets a vivid picture into its mind, all else is excluded. It is quite unable to see both sides of the picture. When, for example, the *Titanic* was sunk, the ruthless popular imagination was captured by mental pictures such as the following which were placarded on every newspaper board: "Cowardly Baronet and his wife who rowed away from the drowning." "Sir Cosmo Duff Gordon safe and sound while women go down in the *Titanic*."<sup>1</sup> Subsequent investigation proved that there was no truth whatever in these allegations. The crowd, however, did not wait to investigate before allowing itself to be carried away by these imaginary pictures, and the public behaved in a disgraceful manner to the Duff Gordons. Woe betide any person who is victimised by the popular imagination !

The fondness of the crowd-mind for visual imagery is demonstrated by the liability of crowds to be the victims of collective hallucinations. It is probable, for instance, that the manifestation known as the 'Angels of Mons' was such a collective hallucination. It is certain that the widespread belief that Russian troops passed through the British Isles during the war was such an instance. Dozens of people testified that they had seen these men. It is now an established fact that not a single Russian soldier ever came.

Such hallucinations take their origin from one mind and then they spread like wildfire to the others present by the contagious suggestibility characteristic of crowds. The hallucination thus created is more and more strengthened by the mutual suggestion of the members of the crowd. Thus Le Bon remarks paradoxically, "The events with regard to which there exists most doubt, are certainly those

<sup>1</sup> See *Discretions and Indiscretions*, by Lady Duff Gordon, p. 192.

which have been observed by the greatest number of persons.”<sup>1</sup>

Let us sum up. Imagination, using the term in the wide psychological sense, is evidently the most primitive form of thinking. In human beings it is predominantly visual in type. In the lower animals, other varieties are also fundamental, especially the olfactory ; smell, apparently, being the most primitive of the specific senses. For some reason this has atrophied in man. In whatever form it may exist, however, imagination is closely bound up with action. Abstract, conceptual thought, on the other hand, by reason of its very nature, tends to inaction. Hence the great practical importance of imagination. To this question we turn our attention in the following chapter.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 30. If this be a fact, it suggests interesting reflexions in regard to the evidence for our Lord's Resurrection appearances, which (with one possible exception) so far as we know were never seen by a crowd of persons.

## CHAPTER II

### HOW IMAGINATION WORKS

A MAN's imagination moulds his life, body and soul. First, we may consider its influence upon his body. This is one of the most familiar experiences in life. It has been exploited with no small success by the founders of the new religion called 'Christian Science'. The pictures in a man's mind have a vast influence upon his bodily health. If a person at the outset of a sea voyage imagines that he is going to be sick, the inevitable result follows. No amount of reasoning or exhortation will avail anything. The steward may say to the passenger, "You can't be sick here," but this will not influence the course of events. Again, if a person is blindfolded and told that he is going to be bled to death, he can be killed by merely pricking his leg with a needle, and causing a small trickle of warm water to run down from the wound. The hypochondriac succeeds in making his body really ill. There can be little doubt that the use of such a word as 'influenza,' and the placarding of it on every advertisement hoarding and in every newspaper, lead a great many people to become ill simply by reason of the influence of a word upon the imagination.<sup>1</sup> We may not, however, illogically convert this proposition and say that because all sick imaginations produce sick bodies, therefore all sick bodies are caused by sick imaginations. That is the cardinal fallacy of Christian Science.

<sup>1</sup> Any member of Parliament who could be instrumental in passing a Bill making it illegal to use this word in advertising would undoubtedly prevent thousands from falling victims to the epidemic.

This point has become so widely known, thanks especially to the popularity of Coué, that it is not necessary to dwell at length upon it here. It is more important for our present purpose to realise to how great an extent human action springs directly from imagination. Logic is powerless when opposed by vivid imagination. Darwin recorded an instance of this which has become famous. He was observing a puff adder in the Zoological Gardens in London. Despite the fact that there was a thick pane of plate glass between him and the reptile, Darwin says that he could not avoid shrinking back every time it made a dart at him : although his reason told him that there was no danger whatever. Imagination *almost* inevitably leads to the appropriate action. That is why we so frequently fail to meet temptation successfully. We allow the evil imagination to dangle before our eyes until we finally succumb. Coué drew attention to one aspect of this principle in his Law of Reversed Effort, which states that when the imagination and the will are in conflict, the imagination invariably wins.<sup>1</sup>

The converse of this truth is equally important and far more frequently overlooked. When the imagination is *not* stirred, action will not follow. For instance, we may reason with and logically convince a person, but unless we can capture his imagination we are not likely to have much influence upon his conduct. Let us consider some of the many instances which illustrate this point. It is said that there are more persons killed by automobiles every year in the United States than there were American soldiers killed in the Great War, but, as the proverb has it, what the eye

<sup>1</sup> There are, however, two objections to this formulation of the Law. First, it is a very imperfect act of 'will' which lacks the co-operation of imagination. Secondly, imagination does not *always* win, though usually it does ; a person cannot be induced by hypnotic suggestion to perform an action which is repugnant to his moral sense.

doesn't see the heart doesn't grieve over. The annual slaughter of the pedestrians makes no appeal to the imagination. Therefore it passes by almost unnoticed. On the other hand, the death of the soldiers is brought before the popular imagination in many ways. There are almost innumerable war memorials and there are solemn annual commemorations ; consequently its memory continues to exert a powerful influence upon the American nation. Again, the total number of murders in the United States every four years equals the American losses in battle during the War ; but because they occur singly and are spread over many months and many districts, they have hardly any imaginative appeal. The result is that nobody pays very much attention to them. Another instance closely parallel to these is afforded by the sinking of the *Lusitania* during the War. It can hardly be doubted that this, more than any other single factor, brought America into the Great War. That was because it made an immensely powerful imaginative appeal. Nevertheless the fact remains that more Americans lost their lives in other wrecks during the War. These losses, however, took place in smaller numbers at a time, so that the imaginative appeal was lost. The Germans made the biggest psychological blunder of the War in sinking the *Lusitania*.

This point has been well expressed by Le Bon.

“A hundred petty crimes or petty accidents will not strike the imagination of crowds in the least, whereas a single great crime or a single great accident will profoundly impress them, even though the result be infinitely less disastrous than those of the hundred small accidents put together. . . . The probable loss of a transatlantic steamer that was supposed, in the absence of news, to have gone down in mid-ocean, profoundly impressed the imagination of the crowd for a whole week. Yet official statistics show that

850 sailing vessels and 203 steamers were lost in the year 1894 alone. The crowd, however, was never for a moment concerned by these successive losses, much more important though they were as regards the destruction of life and property than the loss of the Atlantic liner in question could possibly have been.”<sup>1</sup>

We may further illustrate this point by turning to the question of financial appeals. Everybody knows that appeals to a general or central fund do not excite the same response as those which are specific and local in character. This is due to the fact that the former have little imaginative appeal. It is not easy to picture a central fund, but a local fund is coloured by many familiar associations. Every Chancellor of the Exchequer is well aware of the part played by imagination in finance. That is why he prefers indirect to direct taxation. It makes smaller appeal to the imagination and therefore is less likely to be resented. If it is necessary to impose direct taxation, the wise plan is to spread it out in the form of a number of small taxes. For example, a tax of sixpence on a single article (irrespective of the particular article) will excite far more opposition than a tax of a penny on each of six articles. This is due more than anything else to the fact that the former appeals to the imagination far more powerfully and unpleasantly than the latter. That is why shopkeepers have so many charges ending in  $\frac{3}{4}$ d. or 95 cents. Such sums make a smaller appeal to the imagination. 1/11  $\frac{3}{4}$ d. *looks* much less than 2/-, and 19/11d. looks much less than a £1, until we reflect upon the matter. The same principle enables us to understand the popular mind in relation to the British-American debts. The fact that such and such a sum was borrowed—ninety million pounds to wit—makes a vivid appeal to the imagi-

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* pp. 57 and 58.

nation and dominates the public mind. The fact that the value of money fluctuates and that the sum borrowed is now worth twice as much in goods is hard to bring home to the imagination of men and consequently is largely disregarded. So also are the many complicated economic factors which bear upon this question of the day. Such considerations have little appeal to the imagination and therefore find no lodgment in the crowd mind.

Every successful public speaker knows that the main secret of success is to capture the imagination of the audience at the very beginning of the speech, if possible in the first sentence, otherwise he may largely fail.

"It was by a single remark, by using one of the other fellow's pet phrases at the right moment, that Henry Thornton, American railway man, believes that he assured his success in England as General Manager of the Great Eastern Railway. On arriving, he found himself 'welcome as a frost in May.' The Board of the railroad had stirred up resentment by announcing that no Englishman competent to fill the place could be found. But Henry Thornton, future head of the Canadian National Railways, future leader of one hundred thousand men, used strategy. Publicly he addressed these men in their own language, in words which 'struck the English fancy.' All that he wanted, he said, was a 'sporting chance'." <sup>1</sup>

As Le Bon has truly said, "Anthony made the populace rise against Cæsar's murderers not by abstract reasoning but by simple expedient of showing them his dead body." <sup>2</sup>

This appeal to imagination is equally indispensable for eliciting a response from individuals as well as from crowds.

"For two days Archibald Maclachlan had been trying to sell a certain variety of safety switches to the chief electrician

<sup>1</sup> Webb & Morgan, *Strategy in Handling People*, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 57.

of a large manufacturing firm. As he was cudgelling his brains to discover a successful method, the news came that an employee had been injured on an open knife switch. The man died, and on the same day Maclachlan got an 'order so large that it startled him.' Finally it dawned on the young man that if a workman were to be killed whenever the salesman was trying to convince an obdurate electrician, safety switches would become standard equipment within short order. But actually to kill a workman every time a sale hung fire was neither possible nor desirable, so he decided henceforth to kill them *verbally*. He did, and the sales made by Maclachlan during the few months which followed stand as the record for the Company."<sup>1</sup>

An abstraction in order to influence the average mind must, therefore, be *clothed*. Few persons would die for patriotism, but many have died for their country's flag.<sup>2</sup> That is why so much religious controversy has raged round symbols. It is the red rag that angers the bull, and not redness in the abstract. And the public is hardly more intelligent than the average bull. It is indeed at a positive disadvantage as compared with that animal, for whereas it takes a red rag to anger a bull, the *thought* of a red rag is sufficient to anger a human being. Therefore it is that changes in abstract teaching are scarcely heeded, but let a clergyman change even the details of his visible behaviour in church and he may have the whole parish up in arms. Many a priest has suffered bitter persecution because he has aroused unpleasant, imaginative pictures in the minds of his congregation, whereas another, whose doctrines have been equally subversive of parochial theological traditions, has

<sup>1</sup> B. C. Forbes, *American Mercury*, April 1922, quoted by Webb & Morgan, *op. cit.* p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> The cynic who is reported to have said of the late Lord Kitchener, "Not a great man, but a great poster," knew something about human nature.

been accepted as a safe man. The Scotsman who told the taxi driver not to go so fast because he could not bear to see the fare ticking up so quickly may be said to be a typical specimen of humanity at large. For example, few professing Christians could endure to see a copy of the Scriptures kicked round the room. Such a spectacle would be far more intolerable and likely to raise a more violent protest than the most radical Higher Criticism. The latter is far more damaging to the Bible, but it makes a smaller appeal to the imagination.

The influence of the imagination upon the conduct of the individual is well illustrated in the Epilogue of Mr. Bernard Shaw's play, *Saint Joan*. The Bishop and his Chaplain are talking together :

“ *De Stogumber* : . . . I did a very cruel thing once because I did not know what cruelty was like. I had not seen it, you know. That is the great thing : you must see it. And then you are redeemed and saved.

*Cauchon* : Were not the sufferings of our Lord Christ enough for you ?

*De Stogumber* : No. Oh no : not at all. I had seen them in pictures, and read of them in books, and been greatly moved by them, as I thought. But it was no use : it was not our Lord that redeemed me, but a young woman whom I saw actually burned to death. It was dreadful : oh, most dreadful. But it saved me. I have been a different man ever since, though a little astray in my wits sometimes.

*Cauchon* : Must then a Christ perish in torment in every age to save those that have no imagination ? ”

In this connexion it is important to bear in mind the great force of pictures imprinted upon the imagination in childhood, especially very early childhood. In a recent book dealing with the subject of conversion, the author has made it very clear that many conversions in later life are

ultimately due to the fact that powerful religious impressions were made upon the imagination in early childhood. By means of a variety of examples he shows very plainly the immense influence of the imagery (whether illusory or real) which occupies the imagination of the child. Most important of all (he shows) are the pictures which the child possesses of God and of himself. He cites many instances to prove that these early imaginations are responsible for sudden conversion experiences in later life. "Christian idealism," he says, "once born in the imagination persists until destroyed by dissociation. This persistency is remarkable ; a life and death struggle to preserve it is sometimes protracted over a long period of years." <sup>1</sup>

It is worth while to dwell for a moment upon the *conservative* nature of imagination. When a thought is clothed in imagery, especially in pictorial imagery, it is far more difficult to dislodge from the mind than it would otherwise have been. Especially is this the case if the picture is charged with emotional power. For example, if I make the judgement that the claims of patriotism are not unlimited, I may nevertheless be led to change my opinion without great difficulty. But if I have also in my mind the picture of Nurse Cavell saying 'Patriotism is not enough' the judgement is infinitely more durable. Generally speaking, the influence of a picture firmly hung upon the walls of the mind cannot be destroyed by the most cogent logical argument, but only by superseding it by a more compelling picture. Hence the futility of so much political and religious argument.

The influence of imagination, however, and especially of visual imagination, goes even further than we have thus far observed it. The proverb says that 'Seeing is believing'.

<sup>1</sup> L. W. Lang, *A Study of Conversion*, p. 73.

Equally true is it that believing is seeing. The pictures which we see in our minds constitute our deepest beliefs. Herein lies the chief source of the strength of materialistic philosophies, and the inability of idealism to capture the public mind. The average man cordially agrees with Dr. Johnson in thinking that he had disproved Berkeley's idealistic philosophy by kicking a stone and saying 'I refute him thus.' We cannot 'imagine' the world of the idealist. That is why (to take an analogous instance) Einstein has roused far more opposition in the popular mind than has Rutherford, although in fact the latter's views are really more revolutionary than those of the former.<sup>1</sup> The average person, indeed, is apt to have no powerful belief in what he cannot in some way picture to himself. This may be true even of highly educated minds. Thus, for instance, Sir Arthur Keith testifies with regard to his own religious beliefs. "The third Person of the Trinity—the Holy Ghost—I never could encompass. And even now, when I hear those two words drop from the lips of a clergyman, I try in vain to grasp the image he has in mind."<sup>2</sup>

A good instance of this last point is afforded by the variety of men's beliefs about a future life. Among those peoples who dispose of their dead by burning, belief in another life is apt to be far more virile than it is among those who bury them. As the smoke and the flame ascend up to heaven, they suggest to the imagination life in a higher sphere. The lowering of the corpse into a hole in the ground, on the other hand, suggests the precise opposite. It can scarcely be doubted that the dimness of the belief in immortality

<sup>1</sup> The same principle explains the tremendous hold which Darwin's theory of Natural Selection has upon the modern mind. The beautiful simplicity of the theory has enabled it to capture men's imagination, despite the fact that it is riddled with difficulties.

<sup>2</sup> *Living Philosophies*, p. 144.

among western peoples (in spite of their professed Christianity) is largely due to this cause. Certainly the imagery of a great many so-called Christian funerals suggests to the imagination anything but life beyond the grave. The actual words of the service doubtless do so, but in many cases the ceremony from beginning to end suggests to the imagination something very different. It can hardly be doubted that if the method of conducting funerals in this country were to be changed with a view to making a different impression upon the imagination of those who attend, there would arise in the popular mind a far more vivid belief in a future life.<sup>1</sup>

The prevalence of the disbelief in a future life, in fact, affords a good illustration of the fact that men are ruled by imagination far more than by reason. It is often asserted, and still more frequently implied, that belief in immortality is a figment of the imagination for which there are no rational grounds. The reverse is the case. There are strong rational grounds for believing in a future life, but it is impossible to *imagine* that which 'eye hath not seen nor ear heard,' and that is why belief in it has so weak a hold upon the generality of persons. All imaginative representations of the next life are of necessity anything but convincing.

So great, indeed, is the influence of imagination that it even masquerades as science. An excellent illustration of this is the well-known use of the figure of the burning candle to symbolise the nature of death. It is argued that as the flame disappears when the candle is blown out so does man perish at the dissolution of the body. The force of this argument is entirely derived from the imagination, to which a powerful appeal is made. Dr. B. H. Streeter has recently

<sup>1</sup> Small children should never be allowed to stand at the open graveside.

shown that as a logical argument it is entirely fallacious "for the relation of the life principle to the human brain and body is *totally unlike* the relation of the flame to the candle. . . . When life disappears, at once the physical body begins to decompose ; but when the flame is blown out, the candle *ceases* to decompose. So far as it goes, then, the deduction to be drawn from the flame of the candle is precisely the reverse of that drawn from it by lugubrious moralisers." <sup>1</sup>

Once more, the influence of the imagination is responsible for the hiatus which exists and always has existed between popular and official theology. According to the theology of the Roman Church, for example, Mariolatry is explicitly ruled out. In practice, however, the imagination of the average Roman Catholic runs away with him, and he treats the Blessed Virgin Mary as divine. A cruder instance of the same thing is provided by the popular attitude to Transubstantiation. As defined officially, it is far from being a materialistic doctrine. It is the reverse. The popular imagination, however, has no appreciation of theological subtleties. That is why it conjures up pictures of bleeding hosts and the like. The case is much the same with the doctrine of the Trinity. As officially defined, it is strictly monotheistic, but it cannot be thus imaginatively represented. Consequently in practice the majority of Christians are probably either tritheists or ditheists. For the same reason anti-Trinitarian heresies arose. They were largely due to the fact that the human mind demands satisfaction for the imagination. In Hooker's phrase, these heresies were 'more plain than true.' In other words, they appealed to imagination rather than to reason.

It must not be supposed, however, that Christianity is the

<sup>1</sup> B. H. Streeter, *The Buddha and the Christ*, pp. 278, 279.

only religion, or system of thought, where imagination leads astray. The same holds good universally. For example, Buddha has become deified in the popular Buddhist mind despite the strictly anti-theistic philosophy of his own thought. In like manner, the tomb of Lenin in Petrograd is regarded with a veneration which is nothing short of being religious, although he himself was a pronounced atheist. His personality has captured the imagination of the Russian people, whereas the abstractions of his teaching have passed by the majority untouched. We find an analogous phenomenon in many pantheistic writers. While holding in theory a doctrine which excludes belief in a personal God, in practice they constantly refer to the All in the most impressively personal terms. The reason for this is that the imagination cannot subsist upon abstractions. A man is better or worse than his creed, according as his imagination is better or worse informed.

It is in this connexion that we gain a right conception of the nature and the significance of idolatry, a subject upon which there have been endless misunderstandings. Idols are obviously imaginative representations of the Deity. It is, however, highly necessary to remember—what is usually overlooked—that these idols need not necessarily exist in the outer world. An imaginative conception which exists in the mind alone may be just as much an idol as one which is graven in wood or in stone. Indeed, it is more dangerous ; for then, to use Ezekiel's expression, a man ' takes his idol into his heart,' (*i.e.* mind), and it has a more subtle influence upon him than any external image. And yet, as we have seen continually in this book, such imaginative representations seem to be indispensable. We are, therefore, apparently faced by a dilemma. Either religion must be idolatrous or else it must be weak and ineffective. There is no

escape from this dilemma except one, and that is by Christianity. The essence of the Christian religion is that it claims to show to the world a visible, audible and tangible representation of God, which makes full appeal to man's imagination, but which is not an idol, because it is a *completely adequate* manifestation of the invisible God. All other imaginative representations of the Deity are inadequate and therefore (if taken to be adequate) idolatrous. But the revelation of God in Christ is complete in terms of humanity. Therefore it can never be superseded, and the worship of Jesus of Nazareth is not idolatrous.

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life ; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us ;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." <sup>1</sup>

It would be possible to continue almost indefinitely to illustrate the multifarious working of imagination. One more instance, however, must suffice. We have already had occasion to remark upon the vast influence which a single word may exert upon imagination. This is a very important matter. To the question, What's in a name? the answer is, Almost everything. A hardened criminal once told a friend that he attributed his downfall to the *words* used by bad associates. They never called evil by its right name. For example, they did not say that they were going to kill a disloyal companion. They spoke of 'taking him for a ride.' Human imagination is largely dominated by words. The usual psychological sequence is : first, the word, then the mental image, and finally the action.

<sup>1</sup> 1 John i. 1, 2, and 3. See also on this subject chap. vi. p. 83.

*PART II*  
BIBLICAL

### CHAPTER III

## IMAGINATION AND THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS

THAT imagination plays a big part in prophecy requires no proof. The whole prophetic literature abounds in the most highly imaginative conceptions. The Hebrew prophets are, indeed, unique in the history of the world, because they were men—not one or two, but a long, unbroken succession—gifted with a vivid imagination dominated by a belief in one God. Around this central picture were grouped other high imaginative pictures of contemporary events, just as, to take a homely illustration, a group of photographs are often ranged round one central portrait, larger and more important than the rest.

The imaginative pictures of the prophets were largely visual. They *saw*. Thus the book of the earliest prophet whose writings have come down to us, Amos, begins, “The words of Amos which he saw”. This is typical. Sometimes, however, the imagery was heard. Especially was this the case with the prophet Isaiah, some of whose finest poetry depends for its power upon the auditory nature of his imagery. Unfortunately this tends to be lost in translation. Nevertheless, one or two instances may be cited. In xiii. 4, we have the following account of the approach of the day of the Lord :

“Hark ! a tumult in the mountains, like great people.  
Hark ! the surging of the kingdoms of nations gathered  
together ;  
Yahweh of hosts is mustering the hosts of war.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> George Adam Smith's translation.

Again, take the passage in which the prophet describes the futility of the nations which resist the power of Yahweh :

“ Woe, the booming of peoples multitudinous !  
As the booming of seas are they booming ;  
And the crash of nations immense,  
As the crash of waters are crashing ;  
(Nations—as the crash of great waters are crashing,)  
But he chides it, it fleeth afar,  
Chased as chaff of the hills by the wind,  
As dust-rings in front of the storm.” <sup>1</sup>

Once more, consider the passage from which the famous ‘ Watchman, what of the night ? ’ is derived. The A.V. and R.V. are not very clear. The vision is an auditory one and it relates to Edom. (Dumah is almost certainly an anagram for Edom, the traditional enemy of Israel.) This is what the prophet hears :

“ A voice is calling out of Seir to me,  
‘ How far has the night gone, watchman ?  
How far has the night gone, watchman ? ’  
The watchman answers, ‘ Morning comes, morning—  
and night ;  
would you know more, come back again ’.” <sup>2</sup>

It is only from the point of view of the imagination that we are able to comprehend the function of the prophets. It has been customary of late to speak of them as forthtellers rather than foretellers, on the ground that they were concerned with the present as much as, or even more than, with the future. There is truth in this contention, but if we realise that prophetic thinking was essentially a kaleidoscopic collection of imaginative pictures, it is easy to see

<sup>1</sup> G. A. Smith’s translation in *The Early Poetry of Israel*, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah xxi. 11 and 12 (Moffatt’s translation).

(All the quotations from the Old Testament in this chapter are taken from Moffatt’s translation unless it is otherwise stated.)

that these two views are not mutually inconsistent. Both in a sense are right. The intuition of the prophets enabled them to see the truth of a situation. The pictures which they thus saw in their mind's eye necessarily had a twofold reference, both present and future ; for by seeing into the essential significance of the present, the prophets *ipso facto* were able to divine the probable course of events in the future. A good instance of this is provided by the attitude of ii Isaiah towards Cyrus, the Persian. He intuitively perceived that the Persian domination of Babylon might have momentous results for Israel. Consequently he did not scruple to call Cyrus the Lord's annointed, 'the Messiah,' and to represent God as saying, "I have sur-named thee, though thou hast not known me." <sup>1</sup>

The prophetic picture of Cyrus is portrayed in magnificent verses.

"Come to me, O lands, in silence,  
 wait until I speak, O nations ;  
 come hither—you can speak later on—  
 let us meet in argument.  
 Who roused up from the east  
 the man whom victory ever attends ?  
 Who lets him have nations as a gift  
 and lays kings low before him ?  
 His sword drives them like dust,  
 his bow like chaff before the wind ;  
 he chases them, and passes forward safely,  
 swiftly with feet that never touch the ground.  
 Who brought this about, who did it ?  
 'Twas he who summons the generations from the  
 beginning,  
 'twas I the Eternal, I who am the first  
 and at the last the same." <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah xlv. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah xli. 1-4.

It is in fact a constant theme of this prophet that the God of the Hebrews is vindicated to be the true God because He alone can foretell the course of events. The true prophet sees them imaginatively depicted before his eye. Hence there is a vivid contrast between him and the soothsayers, diviners and worshippers of idols, 'the work of men's hands.' All such 'pray unto a god that cannot save.'

Highly imaginative imagery, then, is the leading characteristic of prophetic thought, and the concrete and pictorial nature of the Hebrew language is well calculated to encourage such imagery. Consequently from first to last the language of the prophets is full of graphic similes and metaphors. They found ready to hand in the common scenes of everyday life abundant material for the conveyance of spiritual truth. Typical in this respect is Jeremiah, of whose use of imagery George Adam Smith writes as follows :

"A girl and her ornaments, a man and his waist-cloth—thus he figures what ought to be the clinging relations between Israel and their God. The stunted desert-shrub in contrast to the river-side oaks, the incomparable olive, the dropped sheaf and even the dung upon the fields ; the vulture, stork, crane and swift ; the lion, wolf and spotted leopard coming up from the desert or the jungles of Jordan ; the hinnying stallions and the heifer in her heat ; the black Ethiopian, already familiar in the streets of Jerusalem, the potter and his wheel, the shepherd, plowman and vine-dresser, the driver with his ox's yoke upon his shoulders ; the harlot by the wayside ; the light in the home and sound of the hand-mill—all everyday objects of his people's sight and hearing as they herded, ploughed, sowed, reaped or went to market in the city—he brings them in simply and with natural ease as figures of the truths he is enforcing. They are never bald or uncouth, though in translation they may sometimes sound so." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> George Adam Smith, *Jeremiah*, p. 54.

The most characteristic thought form of the prophets, however, is the vision. We are told that the prophet developed out of the old seer.<sup>1</sup> It is important to have as clear an understanding as possible, therefore, of the precise nature of prophetic visions if we are to understand the significance of the prophets. We may conveniently distinguish four varieties of visions, provided that we remember that these distinctions are made by us and not by the prophets themselves, and that, even so, there is no hard and fast line between them. From the point of view of the prophets the only essential requirement is that these visions come from God and not from themselves. The false and lying prophets, on the other hand, see a 'vision of their own heart.'<sup>2</sup>

The first and most extreme type is the ecstatic vision, in which the normal processes of consciousness are in a state of suspension. It is safe to say that this is the exception and not the rule with the prophets. Such visions were in fact suspect by them and thought to be characteristic rather of heathen diviners, such as Balaam, who is described as 'the man whose eye was closed.'<sup>3</sup> The Old Testament prophet would have agreed with St. Paul that the spirits of the prophets are subject unto the prophets. Nevertheless ecstatic vision does occur in prophecy, and in the case of one prophet, Ezekiel, plays a very large part. Page after page of his prophecy is given under ecstasy, or, as he puts it, when 'the hand of Yahweh was upon him.' The first eleven chapters of his book contain nothing but the content of such visions. They begin with the well-known vision of God by the river Chebar. This vision, which is rendered difficult of comprehension by reason of its overloaded symbolism, becomes less perplexing if we bear in mind that

<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel ix. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah xxiii. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Numbers xxiv. 3.

we are concerned with the product of ecstasy. The series of visions ends with the ecstatic vision of the new Jerusalem and its restored temple worship. Here also the symbolism is detailed in the extreme. We shall have occasion to return to this later.

The interesting point for us to notice here is that these visions throw light upon the relation between ecstasy and theological thought. Ezekiel was a profound thinker, and in the symbolism of his visions we find expression given to the results of his thinking. In his vision of God (in Chapter I.), for example, we find a concept of God's omnipresence expressed by the representation of the wheels within, *i.e.* at right angles to, wheels. Thus is expressed the possibility of movement to each of the four points of the compass. Again, the four faces of each of the living creatures in the vision are evidently derived from the astral gods of Babylon, in whose charge are the four corners of the earth—Nebo (the man), Nergal (the lion), Marduk (the ox), and Ninib (the eagle). The fact that such conceptions as these are worked into his vision makes it certain that there lay much hard thinking behind it. These visions demonstrate that he had become convinced that Yahweh's transcendent power included all the powers which the Babylonians ascribed to their gods.

We pass to a second variety of the prophetic imagination. This is constituted by intuitive 'openings,' as George Fox would have called them. It is difficult for those not gifted with the power of vivid visualising to realise the significance of these 'visions.' They are not in any sense ecstatic because the experiencer is in full possession of his conscious faculties, and yet they are truly visions. The prophet sees with his mind's eye a vivid scene, as it were in the outer world. While it lasts it is as vivid as the scenes of everyday

life. Usually, however, it lasts for only a moment or two and then is gone.

“ Ever and anon a trumpet sounds  
From the hid battlements of Eternity ;  
Those shaken mists a space unsettle, then  
Round the half-glimpsed turrets slowly wash again.”<sup>1</sup>

Many of the prophetic imaginations beyond question belong to this category, though it is hard to decide in some cases whether the vision is definitely ecstatic or whether it belongs to the variety which we are calling intuitive visions. An instance which it is hard to place, for example, is Isaiah's famous vision (in chapter vi.), which is too familiar to quote here. The probability is that it is an intuitive opening which occurred while the prophet was worshipping in the temple, for we have no evidence that Isaiah was an ecstatic, and it therefore seems to be wiser to interpret this vision in such a way as to bring it into line with the rest of the prophet's visions. We may cite one or two other examples.

In chapter v. 14 and 17, the prophet sees in a vision a picture of Zion being swallowed up by the earth and sinking into Hades and flocks feeding where a moment ago the city had stood.

“ So the underworld gapes greedily,  
opening its jaws ever-so wide,  
and down go Sion's pomp and throng,  
down go all her madding crowd.  
Lambs graze in the deserted scenes,  
kids feed among the ruins.”

Even more vivid is the vision of Babylon.

“ For this is the Eternal's word to me,  
‘ Set your spirit on the watch, to tell what it can see ;

<sup>1</sup> Francis Thompson : *The Hound of Heaven*.



behind them it is a desolate desert—  
 for nothing escapes them.  
 They look like horses,  
 they run like war-horses,  
 as chariots rattle,  
 they leap on the hilltops,  
 like flames that crackle, consuming the straw,  
 like a vast army in battle-array.  
 Hearts are in anguish before them,  
 all faces turn pale.  
 They charge like warriors,  
 they advance like fighters,  
 each on his own track—  
 no tangling of paths—  
 none pushes his fellow,  
 each follows his own line ;  
 they burst through weapons unbroken,  
 they rush on the city, run over the walls,  
 climb into the houses  
 and enter the windows like thieves.”

We take as our final example of intuitive vision Nahum's  
 imaginative picture of the fall of Nineveh, the capital of  
 the Assyrian Empire, although no translation can do justice  
 to the magnificence and force of the Hebrew original.

“ O city soaked with blood !  
 crammed with lies and plunder—  
 no end to your ravaging !  
 Hark ! the crack of the whip,  
 hark ! the rattling of wheels,  
 horses a-gallop, chariots hurtling along,  
 cavalry charging—the flash of the sword,  
 the gleam of the lance,  
 the slain in heaps, dead bodies piled,  
 no end to the corpses—men tripping  
 over the dead ! ” <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nahum iii. 1-3 (Moffatt's Translation, with modifications).

Thirdly, we come to consciously developed similitudes, or parables, as we are accustomed to call them. We must not forget, however, that even here, although the prophet directs his thought upon the fashioning of these allegories, he is still ultimately dependent upon the inspiration of God. All that he can do is to combine the thought and the illuminations which come to him ; but these remain the gift of God. He must wait for the vision if it tarry. The line between these imaginations and the intuitive openings, of which mention has just been made, is very thin, and certainly it would not have been clear to the prophets themselves. These parabolic visions are exceedingly common in prophecy. They occur in the writings of almost all the prophets, but they are most elaborate and conspicuous in those of Ezekiel. For example, this prophet develops the simile of the king of Babylon as a great eagle,<sup>1</sup> Tyre is likened to a magnificent ship, first in harbour and afterwards shipwrecked,<sup>2</sup> Egypt is likened to a crocodile,<sup>3</sup> and Pharaoh to a cedar.<sup>4</sup> All these parables are elaborately conceived and developed sometimes at great length. They are, however, merely conspicuous instances of a phenomenon which is universal among the prophets—the habit of allegorising. Their highly visualising power of imagination rendered this very natural and easy to them.

The fourth variety of visions in the prophets is provided by dreams. Exactly how much of the imagery of the prophetic imagination is derived from dreams it is impossible to say, but certainly some of it is. Probably the amount is greater than we are liable to suppose, since the prophets are somewhat unwilling to use the word ‘ dream ’ in connexion with their prophecies, inasmuch as the dream had fallen into ill

<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel xvii.    <sup>2</sup> Ezekiel xxvii.    <sup>3</sup> Ezekiel xxix.    <sup>4</sup> Ezekiel xxxiii.

repute, owing to its unfortunate connexion with the false prophets.<sup>1</sup> In the case of one prophet, however, we can be practically certain that his visions are nothing else than dreams, since he himself tells us plainly that they are 'visions of the night.' This prophet is Zechariah. Moreover, it makes the interpretation of his eight visions comparatively simple if we bear in mind that they are dreams ; otherwise the symbolism is unaccountably strange. As an instance of the dream vision of Zechariah we may notice here the first two and the last of his series of eight visions. These are all concerned with the problem which was much exercising the minds of the exiles on their return from Babylon. The glowing promises of ii Isaiah whereby it had been foretold that the restored Zion would be infinitely glorious, and that all the nations of the earth would bring their tribute and their treasures into it, were unfulfilled. The actual state of affairs was entirely different ; a sorry and dejected remnant languished in the midst of hostile neighbours. Accordingly in these three visions the prophet sees respectively four horsemen, four horns and four smiths, and four chariots. We notice in each case the figure four. This recurrent symbolism is very characteristic of dreams. The vision makes it clear that it symbolises the four points of the compass. The meaning of the visions is, as an examination of them makes clear, that Yahweh is controlling the movement of all nations, and that in His hands are all the corners of the earth. As dreams these visions become quite intelligible, whereas on any other view they are fanciful in the extreme. Nor does their dream origin render them less valuable as conveyers of truth. Later on we shall see that this same method of interpretation holds good of Zechariah's other five visions also.

<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah xxiii. 25.

Since it would require a whole volume to do full justice to the force and power of prophetic imagination, I propose to take four great 'moments' in the history of the Hebrews, and to observe them in the light of the prophetic imagination. These four moments give us in effect a bird's-eye view of the history of Israel. They are, the exodus, the establishment of the monarchy, the exile, and the restoration. Round these four events the prophetic imagination played like lightning.

The exodus from Egypt goes back to prehistoric<sup>1</sup> times. The Hebrews, however, always looked back to it as the beginning of their existence as a nation. "Out of Egypt have I called my son," wrote Hosea afterwards, speaking in God's name. By this act Israel became in a special sense Yahweh's child. Henceforth His interest and His 'reputation' were regarded as being one and inseparable with those of Israel. Consequently all the prophets refer to the exodus. It evidently captured their imagination, and it certainly dominated that of the general public. Whatever precisely happened at the Red Sea (there are no written records less than at least four hundred years after the event), the popular imagination had set to work upon it, and had painted it in glowing colours. In witness of this we have only to turn to many of the Psalms, notably Psalm cxiv. (Prayer Book version) :

"When Israel came out of Egypt : and the house of  
 Jacob from among the strange people,  
 Judah was his sanctuary : and Israel his dominion.  
 The sea saw that, and fled : Jordan was driven back.  
 The mountains skipped like rams : and the little hills  
 like young sheep.  
 What aileth thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest :  
 and thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back ?

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* as far as Hebrew history is concerned.

Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams : and ye  
little hills like young sheep ?

Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord :  
at the presence of the God of Jacob ;

Who turned the hard rock into a standing water :  
and the flint-stone into a springing well."

That is a powerful imaginative picture.

Evidently this popular picture was fully shared by the prophets. It dominated their imagination. We must not be misled into overlooking this fact because the event itself is not vividly portrayed in the prophetic writings. Frequent references to it make it evident that it was *assumed* by the prophets. Unless we bear this in mind, we shall fail completely to understand the pictures which dominate the prophetic imagination in connexion with the other significant events of Hebrew history.

The next great moment was the establishment of the monarchy. Everybody knows that this did not take place without some questioning on the part of Samuel and the earliest (pre-literary) prophets. This is due to the fact of which we have just spoken, namely, the intimate relation between Yahweh and his people established by the great deliverance from Egypt. The appointment of an earthly king over the Hebrews seemed to be an act of disloyalty. We need not, however, enter here into a discussion of the problems which arise in connexion with the origin of the monarchy. The point for us to notice is that, whereas Saul was a considerable figure in the popular mind, he was completely outshone by David. The popular song with its refrain :

" Saul hath slain his thousands  
And David his ten thousands "

doubtless accurately reveals current opinion at the time. No other individual, not even Moses, seems to have captured

the popular imagination as David did. Consequently all the national hopes which circled round the great imaginative picture of the Messianic age had their centre in him.

There were good reasons for his popularity. He was the first to unite 'all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba.'<sup>1</sup> Further, he greatly impressed the popular imagination by transferring his royal residence from out-of-the-way little Hebron to Jerusalem, which had the advantage of a central and commanding position. He strengthened its fortifications, and consecrated it by solemnly transferring thither the Ark from Kirjath-jearim. So greatly did he dominate the imagination of his contemporaries that they do not appear to have thought the worse of him for building a palace for himself but no temple for God. The force of his personality must have been immense. He became the popular hero *par excellence*.

"And it came to pass that night, that the word of the Lord came unto Nathan, saying,

Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in?

Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle.

In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar?

Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I took thee from the sheep-cote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel:

And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made

<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel xxiv. 2.

thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth.

Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more ; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime,

And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the Lord telleth thee that he will make thee an house.

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom.

He shall build an house for my name : and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men :

But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee.

And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee : thy throne shall be established for ever.

According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David.”<sup>1</sup>

Henceforth Zion, the city of David, was included in the same imaginative picture—‘ God’s own hearth and altar,’ as Isaiah calls it.<sup>2</sup> In one beautiful passage the same prophet pictures its inviolability thus :

“ Like a bird fluttering above its nest,  
shall the Eternal ward Jerusalem,  
shielding her and saving her,  
sparing and preserving her.”<sup>3</sup>

Once more, this picture of David and Zion is taken for granted by the prophets because it was as much part of the

<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel vii. 4-17 (A.V.)    <sup>2</sup> Isaiah xxix. 1.    <sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.* xxxi. 5.

popular view of things as the glories of the British Empire are part and parcel of the mind of an ardent Imperialist. So greatly did it dominate Israel that he evidently believed that it was literally true that Zion could never fall.

In course of time the picture of Zion's inviolability came to be fused in the popular mind with the picture of the day of the Lord. The first reference we have to this conception occurs in Amos v. It is clear from this passage that it had gripped the popular imagination. It was to be the day of triumph of Yahweh over Israel's foes. Yahweh was identified absolutely with Israel. It is difficult for us to grasp the popularity of this idea. Perhaps the best analogy we can find is the gloating of the German mind prior to 1914 over the prospect of *der Tag* when Germany would be *über alles*. It was the hard and unpleasant task of the great prophets, beginning with Amos, to teach the people that these pictures were utterly false. The day of the Lord, they said, would be not light but darkness, not victory but calamity. One prophet in particular, Zephaniah, saw a series of vivid imaginative pictures which run into one another, all depicting the calamitous nature of the day of the Lord. First he saw it as a sacrifice with Judah as the carcase ; then as the searching of Jerusalem with lamps by Yahweh ; then as the punishment of those who are thickened like wine ; then as a strong man crying bitterly ; finally, as a kaleidoscopic picture of trouble, waste, darkness, war and fire. These visions of Zephaniah, as one picture after another passes across the stage of his mind's eye, illustrate almost perfectly the swiftly changing nature of the prophetic visions.

Events showed that the prophets were right. The day of the Lord was anything but a day of rejoicing. When things became very dark, however, the prophetic imagina-

tion conjured up other pictures which served to console and to comfort. The most famous of these were, as might have been expected, Davidic. These pictures are commonly called Messianic, and there is no harm in using this term provided we bear in mind two things. First, the term Messiah, or Anointed, had no technical significance at first. It simply denoted God's chosen representative. Secondly, the prophetic imagination made no attempt to reduce its galaxy of visions into unity and order. From the psychological point of view the Messianic hope, as we are accustomed to call it, was a phantasy ; that is to say, it was a compensation in the imagination for a state of outward misfortune and disappointment, just as the day-dreams of the individual with their castles in the air compensate him for his failure and disillusionment. It is, as we shall see later, important to bear this fact in mind when we come to consider how our Lord fulfilled the Messianic hope.

Accordingly the rise of these visions took place, as we should expect, when a weak and unworthy king, namely Ahaz, sat upon the throne of David. It looked as if the dynasty must after all be overthrown. It was in these circumstances that the prophet Isaiah threw out his famous imaginative pictures of the coming deliverer. He made no attempt to reconcile them. They just tumbled out of his mind. In chapter vii. there is the vision of Immanuel. In chapter ix. there is the vision of the Prince of the four names, Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty Hero, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. In chapter xi. occurs the picture which is misleadingly rendered by the term 'Branch.' This is inaccurate. The vision is of a tree stump after the felling of a large tree, and springing from this stump a little green shoot. So, Isaiah said, shall it be with the Davidic dynasty which God shall deliver.

This simple picture of the coming deliverer is the most important of all those put forward by Isaiah, for it alone influenced the later prophets. It is difficult at first to understand why this should have been so. Nevertheless it occurs not only in Isaiah, but in Jeremiah<sup>1</sup> and Zechariah.<sup>2</sup> It is in fact the only pictorial representation of the coming deliverer which is adhered to consistently by the prophets. Plainly, therefore, it must have captured their imagination, though it is rather difficult for us to understand why. Possibly an incident in the life of Brother Lawrence will help us to appreciate its significance. This writer tells us of his conversion, which occurred in the following way :

“ In the winter, seeing a tree stripped of its leaves, and considering that within a little time the leaves would be renewed, and after that the flowers and fruit appear, he received a high view of the providence and power of God, which has never since been effaced from his soul. That this view had set him perfectly loose from the world, and kindled in him such love for God that he could not tell whether it had increased above forty years that he had lived since.”<sup>3</sup>

This popular picture of the Davidic king and of the inviolability of Zion took an immense hold upon the Hebrew imagination. The temple which Solomon built upon the hill of Zion added a yet further glamour to the picture, and the populace was persuaded that nothing could possibly overthrow the holy Mount. There is a hymn which occurs in both Isaiah and Micah, which was evidently at one time very popular and which expresses this belief very vividly :

“ In after days it shall be  
that the Eternal's hill shall rise,  
towering over every hill,  
and higher than the heights.

<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah xxiii. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Zechariah iii. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*.

To it shall all the nations stream,  
 and many a folk exclaim,  
 'Come, let us go to the Eternal's hill,  
 to the house of Jacob's God,  
 that he may instruct us in his ways,  
 to walk upon his paths.'  
 For instruction comes from Sion,  
 and from Jerusalem the Eternal's word,  
 He will decide the disputes of the nations,  
 and settle many a people's case,  
 till swords are beaten into ploughshares,  
 spears into pruning hooks ;  
 no nation draws the sword against another,  
 no longer shall men learn to fight." <sup>1</sup>

It is to be noticed that Zion is here portrayed as being *higher* than all the mountains. This is typical of phantasy.

It was the painful and perilous task of Jeremiah to disillusion the popular imagination. He told the people plainly that it was no use to say, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these," as they pointed to the stones of the sanctuary of Zion. If Israel did not repent, all would be destroyed and Jerusalem become as a ploughed field. That he too harboured his picture of deliverance is not to be denied. Nevertheless it was drab and unimpressive compared with the other highly imaginative representations of Isaiah. There is just the picture of the shoot springing up from the sawn tree trunk, and nothing more.<sup>2</sup>

This brings us to the third great moment in the history of the Hebrews,—the exile. It requires a considerable effort of imagination on our part to realise what the captivity meant to the Hebrews. Outwardly it meant the end of everything, the state, the monarchy, Zion, the temple. All

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah ii. 2-4.

<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah xxiii. 5.

of these came abruptly to an end. Right up to the very last it was difficult for the Hebrews to face up to this. Even after the first deportation of exiles to Babylon in 597 they still clung obstinately to the hope that the temple was inviolate and that the fugitives would soon return. There were many prophets, false prophets they are called in the Bible, who openly proclaimed this doctrine. It was the difficult task of Ezekiel (who was carried away with the first band of exiles) to bring home to his fellow captives that this was a fundamental delusion. A complete end had come to the old régime. In vision the prophet saw Yahweh solemnly depart from the temple.<sup>1</sup> The outlook seemed quite hopeless to him but for one great and abiding fact upon which he could still find a ground of hope. It was the filial relationship between Yahweh and Israel established, as we have seen, in and through the exodus. This relationship was unbreakable, the prophet believed ; consequently it was impossible that Yahweh should utterly cast off his people. To do so would be to allow His honour to fall into the dust, since the name of Yahweh was inseparably bound up with the name of Israel.<sup>2</sup> The conviction was deeply rooted in the prophet's mind that Yahweh could never fail to carry through the work which He had begun. Indeed, he believed, in the words of the Psalmist, that it was for very faithfulness that He had caused them to be troubled, for it was Israel's disobedience and sin which had brought all this evil upon them.

Consequently it was during the dark days of the exile that the most highly coloured imaginative pictures of the future first came into being. We have the wonderful visions of Ezekiel and the glorious poetical imagery of ii Isaiah. Ezekiel's ecstatic vision of God has already been mentioned. At the close of his book we have a further

<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel x. 18 ff.

<sup>2</sup> See Ezekiel xxxvi. 22.

series of visions which, in this case, are of the restored Israel. David is seen as king over the redeemed community, brought back in imagination to Zion by Yahweh to vindicate His honour. This picture is magnificently represented in the famous vision of the valley of dry bones.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Israel and Judah are to be re-united for evermore.

The final vision of all is the wonderful imaginative picture of the restored temple worship. The prophet, apparently in ecstasy, sees Yahweh solemnly re-enter the temple, as he had previously seen Him leave it.

“ He then took me to the gateway that looked eastward, and there from the east came the Splendour of the God of Israel ! The sound of him was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his splendour. The appearance I saw was like the appearance I had seen in the vision when he came to destroy the city, or like what I had seen at the river Kebar. I fell upon my face, and the Splendour of the Eternal passed into the temple through the gateway facing eastward. Then the Spirit caught me up into the inner court. The Eternal’s Splendour filled the temple, and I heard someone speaking to me out of the temple, while the man stood beside me. ‘ Son of man,’ I was told, ‘ here is the seat of my throne, here is the place for the soles of my feet, where I will dwell among the Israelites for ever ; the house of Israel, they and their kings, shall never again sully my sacred presence with their idolatry ’.”<sup>2</sup>

The details of this vision have but little attraction for us, because they are based upon the structure of Solomon’s temple, with which we are entirely unfamiliar. But those to whom the prophecy was addressed would probably have been well acquainted with it, just as the average Londoner is familiar with Westminster Abbey or St. Paul’s Cathedral. Ezekiel’s vision presupposes such familiarity with Solomon’s

<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel xxxvii.

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel xliii. 1-7.

temple, and represents an idealization upon it. It concludes with the wonderful picture of the river of life flowing out from the east gate of the temple and down for some sixteen miles into the Dead Sea, bringing life with it wherever it goes. This picture is the prototype of the magnificent vision which concludes the Revelation of St. John.

“ Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and there was water flowing east from under the threshold of the temple (the temple fronted east) ! The water was flowing from the south side of the temple, past the altar on the south. He then took me out by the northern gate and led me round upon the outside to the outer gate that faced eastward, and there was water pouring on the south side ! Passing eastward, with the measuring tape in his hand, he measured a third of a mile, and then took me across : the water was up to my ankles. Again he measured a third of a mile, and took me across : the water was up to my knees. Again he measured a third of a mile, and took me across : the water was up to my waist. Again he measured a third of a mile ; and it was a stream I could not ford, the water was deep enough to swim in, it was a stream too high to be forded. ‘ Son of man,’ he asked, ‘ do you see this ? ’ Then he took me back along the bank of the stream, and there by the bank of the stream on both sides, many a tree was growing ! He told me, ‘ This water flows to the region of the east, down through the Arâbah ravine, into the Dead Sea, into the brackish waters which shall turn fresh. Wherever the stream goes, every living creature that swarms shall live ; there shall be shoals of fish, and fishermen shall stand beside the Dead Sea from Engedi to Eneglaim ; it shall be a place for casting nets, and its fish shall be as varied and numerous as the fish of the great Mediterranean. Only, the marshes and swamps shall not turn fresh ; they are to be left for supplying salt. On the bank of the stream, along both sides, every sort of food-tree shall grow ; their leaves shall not wither and their fruit shall never fail ; every

month they shall bear fresh fruit, thanks to the water that flows from the sanctuary, and their fruit shall serve for food, their leaves for healing'." <sup>1</sup>

Such was the effect of the exile upon the imagination of Ezekiel. It was in some respects even greater upon the anonymous poet generally known as ii Isaiah, whose verses begin, "Comfort ye, Comfort ye, my people." Here there are indeed no ecstatic visions but some fifteen or twenty chapters which contain the most magnificent imaginative literature not merely in the Old Testament, but in the world. Fortunately these pictures are among the best known passages in the Bible, and, therefore, lengthy quotation of them is unnecessary. Nevertheless no account of the prophetic imagination would be complete without some reference to them, apart from the sheer delight which comes from quoting them. We set down, therefore, one or two illustrative passages.

We may begin with the opening chapter of the prophecy, for it provides the key to the understanding of the whole. The poet sees in his imagination Yahweh return in glory to Zion. Her sin is pardoned (literally, paid for) by the suffering she has endured in the exile, and the way is ready for Yahweh's return.

"Console my people, console them—  
it is the voice of your God—  
speak to Jerusalem tenderly,  
proclaim to her  
that her hard days are ended,  
her guilt paid off,  
that she has received from the Eternal's hand  
full punishment for all her sins.

Hark ! there is one calling, 'Clear the way  
for the Eternal through the waste,

<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel xlvii. 1-12.

level a highroad for our God  
 across the desert :  
 every valley must be filled up,  
 every mountain and hill lowered,  
 rough places smoothed,  
 and ridges turned into a plain  
 (and the Eternal's glory shall be revealed  
 before the eyes of all :  
 such are the orders of the Eternal)."<sup>1</sup>

Later there follow magnificent imaginative pictures of the future glory of Zion.

" Though mountains be removed,  
 and hills be shaken,  
 my love shall never leave you,  
 my compact for your welfare shall stand firm :  
 so promises the Eternal in his pity.

Poor storm-tossed soul, disconsolate,  
 I will build you up on jewels,  
 and make sapphires your foundation ;

I will make ramparts out of rubies,  
 gates for you of crystals,  
 and all your walls of gems ;

the Eternal will train all your builders,  
 and prosper your sons mightily ;  
 your triumph shall be stable.

Oppression shall be far from you,  
 and nothing need you fear ;  
 ruin shall be far from you,  
 it never shall come near."<sup>2</sup>

. . . . .

" As rain and snow from heaven  
 fall not in vain,  
 but water earth until it yields

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah xl. 1-5.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah liv. 10-14.

seed for the sower, food for hungry men,  
 so with the promise that has passed my lips :  
 it falls not fruitless and in vain,  
 but works out what I will,  
 and carries out my purpose.  
 For you shall leave with joy,  
 and be led off in blissful bands ;  
 the hills shall burst before you into song,  
 and all trees clap their hands ;  
 fir-trees shall grow instead of thorns,  
 myrtles instead of nettles ;  
 and all this shall redound to the Eternal's fame,  
 a lasting monument that never ends." <sup>1</sup>

Most splendid of all is the famous picture in the sixtieth chapter :

" Arise, be glad, your light is dawning,  
 the Eternal's splendour rises upon you.  
 Thick darkness covers all the earth,  
 and a black cloud shrouds the nations,  
 yet the Eternal shines out upon you,  
 his splendour on you gleams,  
 till nations gather to your light  
 and kings to your bright beams.  
 Look round you, look !  
 How they are flocking in,  
 your sons from far away,  
 your daughters carried on the arm !  
 With radiant face you see them,  
 your heart a-thrill and throbbing ;  
 for the rich sea-trade shall flow to you,  
 and the wealth of nations shall be yours.  
 Camels stream across your land,  
 from Midian and Ephah,  
 trains of camels all from Sheba—  
 a testimony to the Eternal's fame !

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah lv. 10-13.

All Kedar's flocks gather to you,  
Nebaioth's rams shall serve your need—  
a sacrifice I welcome on my altar  
within my house of prayer so fair.

Who are these flying like a cloud,  
like doves into their cotes ?  
'Tis ships that gather here to me,  
ships of Tartessus in the van,  
to bring your sons from far away,  
with all their silver and their gold,  
back to where the Eternal your God dwells,  
to Israel's Majesty who has honoured you.

Foreigners shall rebuild your walls,  
their kings shall do you service ;  
for though in wrath I struck you down,  
I show you pity now and favour.  
Ever shall your gates lie open,  
never shut by day or night,  
to let the nations pour their wealth in,  
headed by their kings." <sup>1</sup>

Such was the dazzling picture which ii Isaiah painted of the return of the exiles to Zion. The actual course of events bore a dismal contrast, which must have been painful in the extreme to those who had returned. Instead of finding support from the surrounding nations, as had been predicted, the returned captives soon found themselves the objects of hostility and jealousy from the mixed population which had grown up in the surrounding country since the exile began. Moreover, instead of finding wealth and plenty, as had been foretold, they experienced poverty and well-nigh starvation. The land had lain uncultivated for half a century, and was barren and unproductive. Added to this there was a drought and in consequence a series of

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah lx. 1-11.

bad seasons. A few there were who were able to dwell in 'panelled' houses, but the majority were desperately poor and dejected. It was in these circumstances that the prophet Haggai began to preach. His influence was remarkable. He urged upon his hearers the duty of rebuilding the temple, and told them plainly that their misfortunes were due to their slackness in not having done this. He sought to inspire them with the vision of a house even more glorious than the former, and he pointed them to a world cataclysm preceding the coming of the Messiah, whom he saw in the person of Zerubbabel, who was the governor of the land.

"For this is what the Lord of hosts declares :  
 Very soon I will shake the sky, the earth,  
 the sea, and the dry land, and shake all  
 nations till the treasures of all nations  
 are brought hither and my House here filled  
 with splendour (says the Lord of hosts).

. . . . .

But on that day, the Lord of hosts declares,  
 I will take you, O Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,  
 my servant, and highly honour you, for I have  
 chosen you as mine, the Lord of hosts declares." <sup>1</sup>

The desirable things of all nations would come. Here most likely is a reference to the promises of ii Isaiah. It was a great feat of imagination to see such a picture as this, and an even greater feat to bring the dispirited exiles to see it also. Yet such was the case, for they set to work with a will to re-build the temple, which was actually completed in four years.

The contemporary of Haggai was Zechariah. His teaching was given mainly in a series of eight visions which, as we have seen, were almost certainly dreams. Three of

<sup>1</sup> Haggai ii. 6, 7 and 23.

these visions we have already mentioned. The remaining five are concerned with various aspects of the situation which has just been described. Regarded as dreams, these visions reveal the perplexity of the prophet's mind and the solution which he found.

In the first of them he sees a man with a measuring line attempting to measure the boundaries of Zion.<sup>1</sup> He is told that the city will have no walls in future, since Yahweh Himself will be a wall of fire round about and the glory in the midst. In the next vision the prophet sees the high priest, Joshua, clothed with filthy garments, being rebuked by the adversary. (Hebrew, *Satan* : not yet quite a proper name.) He sees the filthy garments removed and the high priest clothed with fair apparel. The vision closes with the promise of the coming of the 'shoot.'<sup>2</sup> Here the prophet reveals that the return to prosperity is hindered by the sin of the community. This vision reassures him that ii Isaiah was right when he said that the sin of Jerusalem was pardoned.

The third vision presents special difficulties of its own, owing to the dislocated state of the text, but the general tenor is probably clear. The prophet sees a seven-branch candlestick and two olive trees beside it. The former represents the Jewish church-state ; the latter represents the high priest (Joshua) and the governor (Zerubbabel). There is reason for thinking that Joshua and Zerubbabel had quarrelled personally. Moreover, Joshua apparently belonged to the community which had remained in Palestine during the exile. Consequently the returning Zadokite priests would tend to look down upon him, and there was every likelihood of friction arising. These problems find

<sup>1</sup> Zechariah ii. 1-5.

<sup>2</sup> Zechariah iii. (The text is corrupt, but the general sense is clear.)

their solution in this vision, where all parties in church and state are seen working smoothly together.<sup>1</sup>

The remaining two dreams are somewhat crude in their symbolism, but they are simple and their meaning is the same in each case, *viz.* the complete removal of sin from the restored community. In the former the prophet sees the roll of a book (unrolled), inscribed with curses for sins committed, entering into the house of every thief and false swearer. This symbolises the extermination of sinners. In the other, a woman, personifying wickedness, is seen sitting in a barrel, which is forthwith transported to Babylon.<sup>2</sup> It was to an imaginative level as low as this that prophecy had sunk in Zechariah. Yet it cannot be doubted that even these bizarre visions served to keep alive hope in a peculiarly difficult time. God fulfils Himself in many ways.

Such, then, are some of the products of the wonderful imagination of the Hebrew prophets. Their mentality is unique in the history of religion, and beyond question until the coming of our Lord they were the greatest religious force which the world had known. To understand these imaginative feats is to understand the progress of Hebrew thought and experience, for our enquiry will have shown us that their visions embrace the turning points of Hebrew history.

And yet they seemed to fail. The prophetic voices died away, and their words were unfulfilled. There was a silence of over four hundred years, during which no prophetic voice was heard. And then suddenly arose John the Baptist. In him was recognised at once the voice of the Eternal. Hence the unparalleled excitement and stir

<sup>1</sup> See S. R. Driver, *The Minor Prophets*, (Century Bible), pp. 199 ff., Zechariah iv.

<sup>2</sup> Zechariah v.

caused by his appearance. It was his task to proclaim that the day had come when these earlier unfulfilled visions were to find their consummation. There was coming after him a greater One, Jesus of Nazareth.

We shall pass on to consider the imagination of our Lord in some detail in the next chapter, but it is appropriate that we should notice here His relation to the imaginative pictures of the prophets. The significant fact is that the various pictures of deliverance which we have reviewed in the course of our enquiry seem to have had little or no influence upon His mind. He passed them all by in silence, and showed both His originality and His genius by picking out as supremely important two Messianic pictures which, from the psychological point of view, are *toto coelo* different from the majority, because they did not originate as compensatory phantasies. Those psychologists who too lightly brand Christianity, with all other forms of religion, as a mere phantasy, should ponder this fact deeply. The first of these is the picture of the deliverer conceived not as a great conqueror or king, but as a humble monarch indeed, riding not upon the mighty horse, the emblem of war, but upon the humble ass, the beast of peace.<sup>1</sup> That imaginative picture, we know, impressed itself upon His mind so greatly that He definitely identified Himself with it by portraying it in solemn ceremonial on Palm Sunday. It would have been difficult to find any more emphatic way of impressing upon the public imagination the fact that He had not come to fulfil any worldly or material promises.

The significance of the other prophetic picture which He selected as His own ideal He realised as none before Him (not even the writer himself) had ever done. It provided a solution of all those problems which had tormented the

<sup>1</sup> Zechariah ix. 9-10.

mind and heart of Israel for a thousand years. It is the immortal picture of the innocent sufferer in Isaiah liii.

“ He was despised and shunned by men,  
     a man of pain, who knew what sickness was ;  
 like one from whom men turn with shuddering,  
     he was despised, we took no heed of him.  
 And yet ours was the pain he bore,  
     the sorrow he endured !  
 We thought him suffering from a stroke  
     at God’s own hand ;  
 yet he was wounded because we had sinned,  
     ’twas our misdeeds that crushed him ;  
 ’twas for our welfare that he was chastised,  
     the blows that fell to him have brought us healing.  
 Like sheep we had all gone astray,  
     we had each taken his own way,  
 and the Eternal laid on him  
     the guilt of all of us.” <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah liii. 3-6

## CHAPTER IV

### THE IMAGINATION OF CHRIST

It can scarcely be doubted that our Lord possessed the power of vivid visualising. His parables and the graphic form of His teaching afford sufficient proof of this. Moreover, so clearly did He realise the very great importance of visual imagery in teaching, that when a picture did not suggest itself immediately to His mind, He cast about to find one. "Whereunto shall I liken this generation?", or, "Whereunto shall I liken the Kingdom of God?" we hear Him saying as He thinks aloud.

There is a number of incidents in the Gospel story which reveal very clearly how vivid was our Lord's visual imagination. "And the seventy returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us in thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven."<sup>1</sup> That assuredly represents a very vivid mental picture. It is impossible to understand the meaning of the incident unless we recognise that. By the same token, we can hardly appreciate the significance of His Baptism unless we remember His visualising power. For He saw the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. Why a dove? Many explanations have been suggested, but perhaps the problem cannot find a complete solution until we bring it into relation with this same visualising faculty. The Hebrew word for dove is 'Jonah,' and Jonah, as we know, was regarded by our Lord as in some sense a sign of Himself. "There shall no sign be given," He says,

<sup>1</sup> Luke x. 17 and 18.

“but the sign of the prophet Jonah.” In what sense, however, Jonah was a sign our Lord’s contemporaries do not seem very clearly to have understood. According to the Matthean account, it is because Jonah’s three days in the fish’s belly typified the three days that our Lord’s body was in the earth. According to the Lukan version, on the other hand, it was because Jonah (presumably through his preaching) became a sign to the men of Ninevah. Evidently early Christian tradition did not easily grasp the meaning of Jonah in our Lord’s mind.

If, however, the dove which our Lord saw at His Baptism was due, as it may well have been, to His powerful visualising faculty, the meaning of His later reference to Jonah becomes clear. For consider the circumstances. Our Lord had just come up out of the baptismal waters, where He had mingled with a vast number of men and women, who expressed outwardly at least, their repentance. Such an experience might well cause a revulsion of feeling in His breast. We know that it did so in the case of John the Baptist, who referred to some of the members of that crowd as a ‘generation of vipers,’ who were seeking to escape by baptism from the wrath to come, just as the snakes jumped out of the burning bushes in order to escape the flames. If, however, our Lord’s dominating thought at this time was that of the Book of Jonah with its world-wide message of the universal love of God, then the incident becomes intelligible. In that case, the revulsion which He might be tempted to feel towards His unattractive and superficially-minded neighbours in the crowd would be analogous to the revulsion which Jonah felt towards the Ninevites. It was, however, immediately overborne by the spirit of love which the Book of Jonah so plainly breathes. Hence the vision of ‘Jonah.’

Further, this view makes clear our Lord’s later references

to the sign of Jonah. This will represent the universal appeal of His religion, transcending all barriers of race and nationality ; for the message of Jonah is the most universal in the whole of the Old Testament. With this accords the vision to which on another occasion our Lord gave expression ; the vision in which He saw men and women coming from the east and the west and the north and the south and sitting down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Messianic feast.

Our Lord's temptations afford another instance of His keen appreciation of visual imagery. However we interpret these temptations, they would surely never have been recorded by anybody not possessed of a very vivid visual imagination. This is true whether they arose in the waking state or whether, as I have suggested elsewhere, they occurred as dreams.<sup>1</sup>

It is possible that we may find the clue to yet another of our Lord's experiences in the same direction. There is some reason for thinking that the Transfiguration was a graphic pictorial representation of our Lord's thinking. St. Luke explicitly states that it was a vision. If this was the case, it is not difficult to see its significance. Moses and Elijah would be typical pictorial representatives of the Law and the Prophets respectively, just as we have supposed that Jonah typified for Him the universalism of Old Testament thought. We are informed that their appearance was connected with the thought of His approaching death. But we know that our Lord regarded His crucifixion as fulfilling the Scriptures, for on the road to Emmaus He explained how it behoved Him to suffer these things, by referring the disciples back to the Old Testament Scriptures. Supposing this to be the correct interpretation, then the Transfigura-

<sup>1</sup> See my *Magic and Grace*, pp. 190 ff.

tion must be regarded as a dramatic imaginative representation (in which apparently the three disciples who were present shared) of our Lord's thought concerning His approaching Passion. There is some evidence to show that it is possible for a number of persons thus to share a single imagination.

However this may be, there can be no doubt at all that the walls of our Lord's mind were covered with the most vivid pictorial imagery. Nobody has expressed this better than Dr. Glover in his book, *The Jesus of History*.

"He thinks in pictures, as it were; they fill his speech, and every one of them is alive and real. Think, for example, of the light of the world (Matt. v. 14), the strait gate and the narrow way (Matt. vii. 14), the pictures of the bridegroom (Mark ii. 19), sower (Matt. viii. 3), pearl merchant (Matt. i. 45), and the man with the net (Matt. xiii. 47), the sheep among the wolves (Matt. x. 16), the woman sweeping her house (Luke xv. 8), the debtor going to prison accompanied by his creditor and the officer with the judge's warrant (Luke xii. 58), the shepherd separating his sheep from the goats (Matt. xxv. 32), the children playing in the market place pretending to pipe and to mourn (Luke vii. 32), the fall of the house (Matt. vii. 27), or the ironical pictures of the blind leading the blind straight for the ditch (Matt. xv. 14), the vintagers taking their baskets to the bramble bushes (Matt. vii. 16), the candle burning away brightly under the bushel (Matt. v. 15; Luke xi. 33), the offering of pearls to the pigs (Matt. vii. 6)—or His descriptions of what lay before Himself as a cup and a baptism (Mark x. 38), and of His task as the setting fire to the world (Luke xii. 49)." <sup>1</sup>

In like manner, He *saw* in His mind's eye the fatal inconsistency of the Pharisees. Let us quote Dr. Glover once more.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* pp. 57-8.

“We are shown the man polishing the cup, elaborately and carefully ; for he lays great importance upon the cleaning of his cup ; but he forgets to clean the inside. Most people drink from the inside, but the Pharisee forgot it, dirty as it was, and left it untouched. Then he sets about straining what he is going to drink—another elaborate process ; he holds a piece of muslin over the cup and pours it with care ; he pauses—he sees a mosquito ; he has caught it in time and flicks it away ; he is safe and he will not swallow it. And then, adds Jesus, he swallowed a camel. How many of us have ever pictured the process and the series of sensations, as the long hairy neck slid down the throat of the Pharisee—all the amplitude of loose-hung anatomy—the hump—two humps—both of them slid down—and he never noticed—and the legs—all of them—with the whole outfit of knees and big padded feet. The Pharisee swallowed a camel—and never noticed it.”<sup>1</sup>

Such being the quality of our Lord’s human mind, we must attempt (if we are going to enter into His thought), to approach every situation in which we find Him in the Gospel story from that point of view. The question we must always ask about his thinking is, “What did He see ?” Of course, we may not have sufficient evidence to answer the question fully, but the point I wish to make is that unless we do ask that question, we cannot hope to understand His mind. For it is only by asking the right question that we can get the right answer. Moreover, to ask the right question is to go a long way towards finding the right answer.

Let us see how far this method will take us in the interpretation of the Gospels. Take, first, the moment of critical importance when St. Peter had first declared our Lord’s Messiahship. Immediately after this, we read,

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 49.

“And He called unto him the multitude with his disciples, and said unto them, If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”<sup>1</sup>

It is frequently argued that this passage must contain a reading in of later ideas since our Lord could not have spoken in terms of the cross at that stage of the ministry. But if we suppose that this is another instance of His visualising, the saying becomes perfectly intelligible. Our Lord saw in His mind's eye (as He had perhaps seen in literal fact) a procession of condemned criminals carrying their crosses. No more powerful image of self-sacrifice can be conceived than that of a man, without any compulsion, borne down and largely hidden by the instrument of his own execution. What more natural, therefore, than that our Lord should see and employ this picture in pointing to His disciples the lesson of self-denial? Such an interpretation is entirely in keeping with the rebuke which He had just administered to St. Peter, which was to the effect that his imagination was not the imagination of God but the imagination of man.

Another difficult passage on which due regard to this characteristic of our Lord's thinking perhaps throws some light is the cursing of the barren fig tree. Our Lord saw the tree laden with leaves in the distance, and His vivid imagination would naturally conjure up an equally vivid picture of the fruit. Consequently His disappointment on finding no fruit would be far more acute than in the case of a person with a less vivid imagination. For capacity to experience disappointment varies in direct proportion to a person's power of imagination. Moreover, by the cursing of the tree, He would be illustrating in solemn parabolic form His stern disapproval of promise without performance,

<sup>1</sup> Mark viii. 34.

or, in other words, His condemnation of hypocrisy. Being highly imaginative, He would naturally assume that the disciples would understand this.

The disciples however, as we know, were often (as He himself put it) slow of heart, or, as we should say, slow in the uptake, that is, dull and unimaginative. A good instance of this is provided by the incident wherein our Lord warns them against the leaven of the Pharisees. A less imaginative person would have said "the subtle influence of the Pharisees." But not so Christ. He saw a picture of leaven, and that figure He straightway put into words. Moreover, He was genuinely astonished that the disciples failed to catch His meaning.

Sometimes, indeed, this pictorial way of representing things seems to have been designedly employed by our Lord in order to make things more difficult and to provoke thought. That is the great advantage which visual symbolism has over abstract conceptual thought. The latter, by reason of being clear cut, is also limited. Symbolism is less fettered and more suggestive. The essence of the Incarnation is that it was a symbol of God. God was revealed not through concepts, not through abstract arguments and reasonings, but through a historic fact which imprinted itself upon the imagination. "The word became flesh." That is greater than any theory. It was therefore entirely in accordance with the great principle of the Incarnation that, since language had to be used by Christ, it should be as concrete and as highly symbolic as possible. In this way He was able to secure definiteness and firmness of grasp, combined with width of apprehension.

In His dealing with individuals we find, as we should expect, a continual appeal to the visual imagination. In calling the first fishermen disciples, our Lord drew them

with the picture of catching human fish. In dealing with the rich young man, He tried to draw him by holding before his eyes a picture of the heavenly riches. Sometimes, too, He employed word pictures of an *unattractive* kind in order to lead men on. Thus He sought to bring to decision one who was hesitating by showing him the absurd picture of a man ploughing while he looks back over his shoulder. It would be hard to find a more forcible illustration of the futility of a divided mind. For another, who wanted to temporise, He drew the amazing picture of a dead man being carried out to burial by his relations who were themselves bound hand and foot with grave clothes.<sup>1</sup> For another, who had hardly counted the cost of discipleship, He drew the picture of the fox returning to its lair and the bird to its nest, while the Son of Man was a homeless wanderer. He did not reason or discuss the situation at length with people, as we might have been tempted to do had we been in His place. He simply showed them the meaning of discipleship by vivid word pictures and left it at that. Thus it was that when St. John the Baptist was in doubt and sent messengers to ask whether He were indeed the Christ, His reply was, "Go your way and tell John the things which ye do *hear and see*."

In healing the sick, our Lord's appeal was invariably to the imagination. When the ten men who were lepers appealed to Him, His reply was, "Go show yourselves to the priest." We must not miss the significance of this. According to the Jewish law, a person showed himself to the priest only when he was *healed*. The meaning of our Lord's injunction was therefore this: Imagine yourselves to

<sup>1</sup> In the case of these two men doubtless these pictures symbolise what Adler would call their respective 'styles of life,' which our Lord had intuitively discerned.

be well. His command called up vividly in their minds a picture of themselves healed. They obeyed, and they found that the imagination had realised itself in actuality.

Once more, our Lord in His teaching about prayer tried to capture men's imagination by graphically depicting its power. He even likened it to the moving of mountains. He told His hearers that if they could allow the picture of God's power thus to dominate their minds, they would not be disappointed. "Therefore I say unto you, all things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them and ye shall have them."<sup>1</sup> In fact, it is clear that faith, as our Lord understood it, was largely a question of imagination.

In like manner, our Lord's ethical teaching can be appreciated only so long as we bear in mind its vivid and pictorial quality. Such injunctions as to turn the other cheek, or to have only one coat, or to walk two miles rather than one, are plainly imaginative representations of ethical principles. Teaching of this kind was in complete and violent contrast with the methods of the rabbis. They made every effort to be precise and literal in their ethical instructions. They had rules and regulations for everything down to the least detail, and had indeed almost succeeded in reducing the moral law to the most unpictorial form of thought possible, namely, arithmetic. They laid it down how many times a certain action might be performed, how many yards one might walk on the Sabbath, and so forth. Some of the rabbis even taught that righteousness and wickedness were determined by the excess of good over evil actions. A balance of one good deed, they held, was sufficient to make a man righteous. Mr. Montefiore, himself a Jew, admits that there was a "tendency to regard

<sup>1</sup> Mark xi. 24.

the whole affair of life as if it were a case of school-boy marks." <sup>1</sup>

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the Scribes and Pharisees failed to understand the teaching of this highly imaginative Rabbi ; nor are they the only persons to whom unimaginative literalism has been a stumbling block hindering the appreciation of Christ's teaching. The same holds good of not a few modern critics. It is said that one critic searched contemporary Jewish literature from end to end in order to find an instance of a Pharisee who blew a trumpet before putting his money in the church collection. And yet the rabbis were not really deficient altogether in imaginative power. Nobody, as we have seen, is really deficient in imagination. All have some degree of it. The drawback, however, to the imagination of most persons is that it is self-centred. Where their own interests are concerned they are able to visualise quite well. So it was with many of the Pharisees. They doubtless saw vividly enough in their mind's eye pictures of themselves as they made a parade of their religious duties. Our Lord definitely suggested that this was the case in His parable of the Pharisee and the publican. "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself." There we have an account of something which took place in the man's own imagination. He saw a picture of himself and took pleasure in thinking that others were also looking at it.

This is always what happens with those who, as we say (not quite accurately), have no imagination. Egocentric pictures occupy so much of the available space of the mind that there is little room left for pictorial representations of the needs and thoughts of others. The wall space of the human mind, though enormously large, is not unlimited.

<sup>1</sup> C. G. Montefiore, *Rabbinical Literature and Gospel Teachings*, p. 22.

Once more, the central place which imagination held in our Lord's outlook explains the *inwardness* of His ethical teaching. This is not simply due to the fact that He laid great stress upon the importance of the motive in determining the moral quality of an action. This aspect of His teaching was due more than anything else to the fact that He realised that both sin and goodness have their origin in the imagination. Perhaps the best illustration of this is provided by His teaching about adultery. "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery already." In other words, every adulterer in act begins by being an adulterer in imagination, which means that the sin of adultery must first be conquered in the imagination. The person who is pure in imagination will be pure in act. The person with an impure imagination is doomed. Such is the meaning of Christ's teaching, and experience shows that beyond question He was right.

Finally, we find in this doctrine of the imagination the clue to the meaning of our Lord's teaching about faith. Faith to Him was nine parts imagination. This point has too frequently been overlooked. For example, some scholars have said that Christ's teaching about faith is in no way essentially different from that of the rabbis. This is quite untrue. According to the rabbis, faith was a good work which God rewarded. For example, they taught that the cleaving asunder of the waters of the Red Sea was the reward of the faith of the Israelites in Egypt.<sup>1</sup> This is altogether different from what Christ taught about faith. In His view the faith *itself* works the reward. Constantly He said to men "Thy faith hath saved thee"; and the core of His idea of faith was imagination. "Have faith in God," He said to His disciples, and then proceeded to illustrate

<sup>1</sup> Montefiore, *op. cit.* p. 203.

His meaning by a gigantic appeal to the imagination. Picture to yourselves, He said in effect, the biggest thing you can imagine—a mountain—and in your mind's eye see it being taken up bodily and cast into the sea. Faith is like that. When you pray, imagine to yourselves that the request you are making has been realised already, and it shall be so. Our Lord tried to help men to faith in God by vividly picturing for them His watchful care over every individual. The man of faith, He taught, will see God behind the fall of even the tiniest bird. He will also realise that God cares infinitely for every human being. Here our Lord made a tremendous appeal to the imagination,—“Even the hairs of your head are numbered.” Our Lord Himself was able to create faith in men because he captured their imagination. It was by faith, by capturing their imagination, that He was able to save them.<sup>1</sup>

Consider, for instance, that early scene, the strangeness of which we may easily fail to observe. The disciples had been fishing all night and had taken nothing. Our Lord tells them to let down their nets once more. They obey, and now their nets are filled to breaking point, the little boat being almost submerged. “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man,” cries St. Peter. What connexion is there between the event and St. Peter's cry? The cause hardly seems to be sufficient to account for the effect. The answer is that Christ caught St. Peter's imagination as being somebody not of this world.<sup>2</sup>

After the Resurrection this imagination was strengthened.

<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, our Lord studiously avoided capturing the *popular* imagination: hence His shunning of crowds and public display. He likewise warned His followers against this, “Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you.”

<sup>2</sup> This, as Otto has pointed out, is suggested by the presence of the word *θαύματος* in the text of Luke v. 9.

It might perhaps be supposed that the whole of the experiences recorded in the Gospels as taking place after the Resurrection are nothing but the product of an overheated imagination. Certainly, as we have already seen, hallucinations are possible, but there is one insuperable objection to this possibility here. If our Lord did not rise from the tomb, why did not the Jews produce His dead body? <sup>1</sup> Had they done that, it would have been possible to kill the Christian Church at a single blow. After the Resurrection our Lord indeed dominated more and more the imagination of His disciples, as He had done prior to the Crucifixion. It was no mere hallucination. In witness of this may be also adduced nineteen centuries of Christian experience.

<sup>1</sup> The theory that the disciples stole it away is psychologically impossible and ethically self-contradictory. It is the former, because it supplies no adequate motive; it is the latter, because it founds the Christian Church upon a fraud.

## CHAPTER V

### ST. PAUL AND IMAGINATION

IT will hardly be disputed that the heart of the Gospel as understood by St. Paul is faith. Many volumes have been written in the attempt to interpret what exactly faith meant to the Apostle but, so far as I am aware, nobody has suggested that the one word which provides the key to the problem is the word 'imagination.' For St. Paul, as for our Lord, the essence of faith is imagination. To attempt to maintain, as some have done, that their views of faith are radically different is quite wrong. The only difference between the two is that whereas for our Lord the imagination is dominated by the Father, for St. Paul, as for the early Church generally, it is dominated by the Son. Faith in Christ sums up the Gospel according to St. Paul. In other words, for him salvation consists in a Christ-dominated imagination.

It is generally accepted that St. Paul's theology grew out of his own religious experience. This experience may be summed up by saying that he learnt what it meant for Christ to dominate his imagination. He himself tells us that as a Jewish rabbi he concentrated all his efforts on obtaining righteousness. He tried hard, and yet, although 'blameless,' he knew that he had 'fallen short.' One day, however, he stood by as one of the despised sect known as Christians was stoned to death. "They stoned Stephen, calling upon the Lord and saying, Lord Jesus receive my spirit. And he knelt down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had

said this, he fell asleep.”<sup>1</sup> Doubtless the face of St. Stephen in that moment looked, as it had done when he stood some hours earlier before the Council, as the face of an angel. It reflected the glory of Christ. It can, I think, hardly be doubted that the vision of the dying Stephen haunted St. Paul’s imagination, and was ultimately responsible for his conversion.

At first, however, he attempted to repress the effect of that tremendous impact upon his imagination, and he sought feverishly to find salvation by an increasingly bitter persecution of the Christians. There can be little doubt that this was an attempt to vindicate himself and his own position, or, to use his own phrase, to ‘establish his own righteousness.’ Subconsciously, however, he realised that he was fighting a losing battle, and in the end his Christian imagination won. In the famous account which he gives us of his conversion, he relates that he heard our Lord speaking to him and asking him why he continued to kick against the goad,—that is to say, he felt himself as helpless in that moment as an ox driven forward by a goad. His opposition to Christ suddenly collapsed. He ceased to attempt to justify himself. In other words, the imaginative picture of himself as the impeccable Jew (which he knew subconsciously was a sham) gave place to the imagination that Christ alone is the ruler of the heart, as the life and death of Stephen had witnessed. Stephen, he knew very well, had made no attempt to justify himself. His famous defence was not concerned with himself at all ; and in his death it was the picture of Christ and of his murderers which filled his imagination. St. Paul realised that herein lay the secret of Stephen’s life.

When St. Paul had time to think out the significance of

<sup>1</sup> Acts vii. 59-60.

this tremendous experience with all its implications, his thoughts took shape in the famous doctrine of justification by faith. The essence of this is that salvation consists not in making frantic efforts to hold fast to the imaginative picture of one's own integrity, but in allowing Christ to dominate the imagination. "Now apart from the law, a righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe."<sup>1</sup> If the word 'imagination' is substituted for faith in this passage, its meaning becomes clear. When the imagination is dominated by Christ, then and then alone is it possible to attain righteousness. It is, in fact, nearly true to say that in almost any passage in which the word 'faith' occurs in St. Paul's writings, the word 'imagination' can be substituted for it without doing gross violence to the meaning. The secret of victory over sin is to be found in the right kind of imagination.

The fatal weakness of the Jewish law was that it was apt to stir the wrong kind of imagination. "Sin taking occasion by the commandment wrought in me all manner of concupiscence."<sup>2</sup> In other words, the effect of the prohibitions of the law was merely to fill the imagination with pictures of evil, and the effort to obey the law served rather to impress these imaginations more firmly on the mind. St. Paul had discovered by bitter experience the truth of Coué's Law of Reversed Effort. That is why he set faith in antithesis to works. It was not, as some of his opponents suggested, because he was indifferent to moral action or because he was antinomian in tendency, but because he knew from personal experience that all direct efforts to attain righteousness are frustrated by the Law of Reversed Effort.

<sup>1</sup> Romans iii. 21-22.

<sup>2</sup> Romans vii. 8.

Let us enquire more precisely what pictures St. Paul believed should fill the imagination of the Christian. First and foremost there is the picture of Christ instead of the picture of self. "I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me" he says. This picture, however, was of Christ crucified. The words which immediately precede are, "I am crucified with Christ." And in the same Epistle in which these expressions occur St. Paul addresses the Galatians as those "before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified"; or, in Lightfoot's famous rendering, before whom the death of Christ was 'placarded.' It was this picture of Christ upon the Cross which touched the apostle's heart to love Him who, as he said, 'loved me and gave himself up for me.'<sup>1</sup> It was thus that faith was stimulated.<sup>2</sup> For love is the most powerful of all stimuli of the imagination, stronger even than fear.

The picture of Christ crucified, however, dissolves in St. Paul's mind into another picture,—Christ risen and glorified. We are very liable to-day to miss the significance of this picture of the Resurrection as St. Paul imagines it, because we are unfamiliar with the symbolism of baptism by total immersion. The symbolism of that form of baptism was calculated to appeal strongly to the imagination. The catechumen went down into the river and was plunged for an instant beneath the waters. His disappearance from sight symbolised the death of his past life. His rising again from the waters typified his resurrection to a new life with Christ. That is why the picture of the risen Christ in the imagination of the believer is so frequently associated by St. Paul with burial; for the Christian is buried beneath the waters of baptism. In order, therefore, that the thought of being risen with Christ may dominate

<sup>1</sup> Galatians ii. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Galatians v. 6.

the imagination of the believer, it is necessary for him to hold fast the complementary picture of being dead to the sin of the past. "Reckon ye yourselves also to be dead unto sin but alive unto God in Christ Jesus." <sup>1</sup>

In other words, once a person's imagination is filled with the picture of the death of his past sin and the reality of his resurrection with Christ, then victory over sin is assured. This is the core of St. Paul's presentation of the Gospel. The believer appropriates by faith the risen Christ in his imagination as a ground of pardon and as a pledge of righteousness, and there is established thereby an intimate union with Christ.

Herein is the key to the understanding of the Apostle's doctrine of justification by faith. It is now generally recognised that by 'justify' St. Paul meant 'to hold just' rather than to 'make just.' We may, therefore, say that justification by faith equals 'justification by imagination.' We are 'held just' as soon as we imagine this to be the case. In other words, it is through imagination that we appropriate the power and the goodness of God. That is why St. Paul lays such frequent emphasis upon the *initial moment* when the contact with Christ is first made. The influence of Christ is "like magnetism which begins to act as soon as the connexion is complete." <sup>2</sup> The means through which this connexion is made is imagination. Once the latter is seized with the idea that God accepts us not as we are but as we shall be, there is painted upon the walls of the mind an ineffaceable picture which henceforth dominates a person's life, and which assures him of ultimate victory over sin.

Unfortunately this picture has been much misunderstood in Christian history. It has been supposed that the

<sup>1</sup> Romans vi. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, p. 28.

picture which dominates the imagination of the believer is completely and fully actualised from the first moment of surrender to Christ. In other words, it has been held that the believer in Christ is henceforth sinless. The result of this misconception has been to reintroduce into Christianity a new and most unpleasant variety of Pharisaism.<sup>1</sup>

St. Paul himself was evidently a man of strong and vivid imagination. Consequently his word pictures describing his union with Christ—his Christ mysticism as it is called—are very striking. Some have even attempted to maintain that St. Paul stands alone in this respect in the New Testament. It is more correct, however, to suppose that the same set of ideas is present in the minds of all the New Testament writers. St. Paul's strong personality and vivid imagination, however, make his presentation of them the most forcible of all.

It is important to emphasise that this teaching of St. Paul is inseparably bound up with the imagery of baptism, for there has been, and still is, a tendency on the part of some to divorce the Apostle's doctrine of justification by faith from sacramentalism in every form, and even to set the two in antithesis. Nothing could be further from the truth. "We were buried therefore with Him through baptism unto death," he writes, "that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life."<sup>2</sup>

It does not seem to have been the danger of false sacramentalism which troubled St. Paul. His concern rather was lest men should be led astray by their imagination to covet gifts, or *charismata* as they were called. One of these

<sup>1</sup> This danger has not been entirely avoided by the Group Movement. See p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> Romans vi. 4.

in particular, 'speaking with tongues,' especially captivated the imagination of the early Church and even came to appear in the eyes of many as the hall-mark of a true Christian. It is not difficult to understand the reason for this. The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost had, as we know, been marked by a manifestation of various ecstatic utterances. These were spectacular enough and likely to impress the imagination, especially of the more ignorant and uneducated. St. Paul was, therefore, at some pains to uproot this idea and to put in its place the picture of the most excellent gift of all—love—portrayed with magnificent imaginative power in the famous hymn in 1 Corinthians xiii.

We must not, however, overlook the vitally important fact that St. Paul's teaching about faith and imagination is altogether incomplete apart from his doctrine of the Holy Spirit. From what has been said it might perhaps be supposed that St. Paul taught that salvation is to be achieved by man's unaided efforts, since the only requirement is that the imagination should be filled with the thought of Christ's power. Such a supposition, however, would be altogether false. We have no power thus to fill our minds with the picture of Christ. In order that this may occur we are dependent upon the grace of God's Holy Spirit. It is through the operation of the Spirit that, in St. Paul's words, 'every thought is brought into captivity to Christ.' It is through the Spirit that we have what St. Paul calls 'the mind of Christ.' It is only through the Spirit that the Apostle can say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Professor Bruce expressed this truth exactly when he said, "The truth as it is in Jesus, the idea of Christ, is the Spirit's instrument in sanctification."<sup>1</sup> That is to say, it is the Spirit alone that

<sup>1</sup> A. B. Bruce, *St. Paul's Conception of Christianity*, p. 254.

brings home to our imagination the love of God as revealed in the earthly life and death of Christ<sup>1</sup> and the power of God revealed in His Resurrection.

The foregoing considerations enable us to appreciate the significance of St. Paul's very frequent references to the flesh as contrasted with the Spirit. If we make the not unnatural supposition that St. Paul is here drawing upon his own experience rather than upon Philo, or any other authority, then it is evident that the flesh for him means the power of *fleshly imagination*. In other words, his own experience had taught him that sins of the flesh least of all can be overcome by effort. The Law of Reversed Effort is especially liable to come into play here with fatal results. This explains why the 'flesh' looms so large in the Apostle's writings. Sins of the flesh are for him the most typical of all sins just because they reveal more clearly than any others the fact that all sin has its root in a sinful imagination. As we have already seen, our Lord's teaching suggests the same doctrine. St. Paul's own experience had proved to him, however, that once Christ captured a person's imagination, all other imaginations were thereby dispossessed. "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds. Casting down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."<sup>2</sup> No other object in his experience save Jesus Christ possessed that power; but, beyond question, Christ did possess it. That is why he became a Christian.

Doubtless even after his conversion the temptation to evil imaginations was never far distant. The struggle

<sup>1</sup> Romans v. 5.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians x. 3-5.

against evil had to be continued even after the surrender to Christ on the Damascus road. Nevertheless, from that moment the fight assumed a very different aspect. It was no longer a hopeless struggle against an invincible foe. Victory, he never doubted, was assured. Moreover, for the most part he was able confidently to triumph over every passing temptation. From time to time, however, the forces of evil seemed to rally and to assert themselves, and then it was that he realised especially the necessity for stern self-discipline. "I buffet my body and keep it under," he says. That represents an experience with which even the man with an imagination sanctified by Christ through the Spirit cannot dispense. Although St. Paul's faith was triumphant, it by no means represents the attitude of an unpractical dreamer or sentimentalist.

*PART III*  
PASTORAL

## CHAPTER VI

### WORSHIP AND IMAGINATION

WORSHIP depends upon and indeed may be said to consist in the right relationship between man and God. It is the offering to God of His due, his 'worth.' Since imagination plays so large a part in man's life, it is evident that it will constitute an important element in worship. For the offering of right worship the imagination must be rightly directed ; but herein lies a difficulty. God is spirit and therefore invisible. More than that, He is incapable of apprehension by any of the senses ; and yet in the case of the majority of persons, apart from the stirring of imagination, thought is apt to be weak and action ineffective, if not non-existent. We have seen that the average worshipper's belief in God is feeble just because God cannot be grasped by the imagination. We should therefore expect that the art of worship would consist largely in the discovery of methods of bringing the imagination to bear upon the things which 'eye hath not seen nor ear heard.' The evidence shows that this in fact is the case.

We may conveniently discuss our subject under four heads, which comprise the fundamental elements in worship. We may state them as follows :

- (a) Images.
- (b) Temples and shrines.
- (c) Ceremonial.
- (d) Ritual.

*Images.* The most obvious way to stir the imagination in worship is to make an image of the god. It is not surprising,

therefore, that this course was adopted amongst primitive peoples. According to the variety of men's conceptions of God so was the variety of idols. That is to say, the mental image preceded the material image. This fact is important in its bearing upon the problem of worship, as we shall see later.

Provided that the idol had been distinguished from the god, there would have been no harm in this method of procedure. But the primitive is totally unable to make such a distinction. On the contrary, even in the case of a human effigy, he is unable to differentiate between the copy and the original. He thinks that if he makes an image of his enemy and then injures it in any way, the injury will be transmitted to the object of his hatred. Consequently it was inevitable that the idol should be identified absolutely with the god ; not simply in the sense that the primitive worshipper was apt to confuse the two in his thinking (even Christian worshippers may do this), but in the sense that the two were definitely regarded in his mind as being in some sense identical. In what sense exactly is a matter of dispute and need not concern us here. It is sufficient for our purpose to note that no clear distinction is made by uncivilized man between the copy and the original.

It is a well-known fact that in the great monotheistic religion of Israel this identification of the image and the god—idolatry as we call it—was laughed out of court. As the Psalmist mockingly says :

“ Their idols are silver and gold :  
even the work of men's hands.  
They have mouths, and speak not :  
eyes have they, and see not.  
They have ears, and hear not :  
noses have they, and smell not.

They have hands, and handle not :  
feet have they, and walk not :  
neither speak they through their throat.  
They that make them are like unto them :  
and so are all such as put their  
trust in them.”<sup>1</sup>

ii Isaiah waxes even more sarcastic at the expense of the idolater, describing in vivid portraiture the felling of the tree, the burning of half of it in the fire to keep the worshipper warm, and the making of the other half into a god.<sup>2</sup> It is too frequently forgotten, however, that it was not the image as such that was condemned, but only the identification of the image with the god. That is why it was only the images of *false* gods which were condemned even by the great monotheistic prophets, Elijah and Amos. The ‘Calves’ which were symbols of Yahweh were never attacked by them as idolatrous. The first person to do this was Hosea, who did so not on the ground that they were images, as such, but that they symbolised a wrong relationship between Yahweh and his worshippers. This relationship, he said, was not one of real worship but merely of utility. Men were using God in order to procure the fertility of their crops. This relationship was, as Robertson Smith says, ‘in its very nature a carnal love.’<sup>3</sup> Its motive was not self-oblation, but self-interest, and as such in his eyes it stood condemned.

It was probably not until the Deuteronomic code that the use of all images as such was prohibited in Israel, but even here prohibition was not absolute. The Commandment which forbade the making of any graven image or likeness

<sup>1</sup> Psalm cxv. 4-8. Prayer Book Version.

<sup>2</sup> See Isaiah xlv. 9-20.

<sup>3</sup> See W. Robertson Smith, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 177.

was not to be observed in the Sanctuary itself, although indeed no likeness of the Deity Himself was permitted.

The imagination avenged itself of this, as it inevitably must when it is denied an outlet. If pictorial art is excluded from worship, then the visual imagination will fasten upon some other objects. We have already seen what some of these were in the case of the Hebrews. They were the image of the Temple itself, and, subsequently to its destruction, that of the Messiah and of the idealised Zion. Even more significant than this, however, was the way in which the imagination fastened upon the written word.<sup>1</sup> The *letter* of the law gradually captured the Hebrew imagination. Ultimately this led to the most complete and abject idolatry which can be conceived, namely, literalistic legalism. We know it to-day amongst ourselves as Fundamentalism. This is every bit as idolatrous as the worship of a carved or a graven image.

The foregoing brief historical survey has been necessary in order that we may appreciate the importance of the right use of the visual imagination in worship. There is only one completely satisfactory method of solving the problem which this raises, and this method Christianity claims to possess. It is to present an adequate image of God. According to Christian belief this is what Jesus of Nazareth did. He is, in St. Paul's words, 'the image of the invisible God'<sup>2</sup> because He is Himself the Incarnate Son. According to the records, our Lord definitely allowed men's imagination to be captured by Himself. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." Whether these words of the fourth Gospel are the *ipsissima verba* of Christ or not, they un-

<sup>1</sup> In this connexion note how in Calvinistic churches, where all pictures are excluded, the Ten Commandments are written upon the walls.

<sup>2</sup> Colossians i. 15.

doubtedly represent His point of view. He both acted and spoke as one having authority and not as the scribes. He definitely permitted and even encouraged people to make Him the centre of their imagination in a way which would have been in the worst possible taste (to state the objection no more forcibly) in one who did not regard himself as being in a unique relationship to God.

The picture of Christ which has come down to us is a word picture. In any event the Hebrew tradition would have rendered any other kind of portraiture impossible. This picture plays, and always will play, a central part in Christian worship. Yet there does not on this account seem to be sufficient reason for suppressing imaginary portraits of Christ. They too have their place and may do not a little in assisting to lift up the heart and the mind to God.

In the conduct of Christian worship the appeal of our Lord to the visual imagination should be frankly recognised and utilised in every possible way. At present this is not always the case. Sometimes it is ignored through negligence, or unawareness of its importance. Sometimes it is opposed through confusion of thought and prejudice. Such is plentiful where the use of images is concerned. There are many, for example, who availing themselves freely of the word picture in the Gospels are scandalised by the use of crosses, crucifixes and images of various kinds. Others, again, see no objection to, and even delight in, a stained glass window or a picture, but repudiate with indignation a carved or a graven image. Yet it is difficult to see why the use of a three-dimensional picture is less justifiable than that of a two-dimensional.

There is a danger, of course, in all appeal to the use of the visual imagination in religion, but it is not generally realised wherein the danger really lies, for it is frequently

forgotten that a mental picture constitutes as great a spiritual danger as a material picture. It is in fact the earliest form of idolatry since, as we have seen, mental images necessarily precede graven images. This danger in essence is that the picture may come to be regarded as a final revelation of God. Apart from the Incarnation this can never be the case. Nor is it so even here. Although *objectively* the picture is final in the case of the Incarnation, its *subjective apprehension* by man is never perfect, and should continue to advance towards perfection. In order to guard against these dangers the pastor should remind himself and his flock of the inadvisability of relying too much upon a single picture, or set of pictures, whether mental or otherwise, in religious worship, and urge them to make use of variety and change in the pictures, whether mental or material, which form part of their devotions.

*Temples.* From time immemorial temples and shrines have been employed in religious worship. Among primitive peoples they were regarded as the dwelling place of the god. This belief was held in such a crude and literal form that the great teachers of monotheism were constrained to teach that the Almighty dwelleth not in temples made with hands. Heaven, they said, is His throne, and earth His footstool. True as this undoubtedly is, it is not the whole truth. Despite God's omnipresence there is, nevertheless, a real difference between a church and a meeting house. One is God's house, the other is man's.<sup>1</sup> Our Lord by His solemn cleansing of the Temple manifestly declared that such was the case. He taught that it should be held in reverence as God's house and be regarded as a house of prayer.

<sup>1</sup> *A fortiori* is this true for one who believes in the doctrine of the Real Presence in the most holy Sacrament of the Altar.

There is a sense, therefore, in which a church is specially God's dwelling place. Granting God's omnipresence, it is natural to enquire how this can be. The answer is that certain places are peculiarly God's not because He is not, but because He is, everywhere. These places representatively dedicate the whole of space, just as, for example, one day in the week is set apart representatively to hallow the whole of time. Because this is the case, God is more accessible in some places than in others.

This truth is recognised even in the austere system of Calvinistic worship. Heiler quotes an inscription which illustrates this. It is written above the door of a Huguenot church.

“ C'est ici le temple de Dieu,  
Chrétiens, venez dans ce saint lieu  
Avec amour, respect et crainte  
L'adorer dedans sa maison sainte.” <sup>1</sup>

Such being the case, it would seem to be the task of church builders to minister in every possible way to the accessibility of God by stirring man's imagination ; for the influence of architecture upon the imagination may be immense. Especially is this the case with Gothic architecture, which has been well described as ‘infinity made imaginable.’ It has a very great power of uplifting the human spirit. This is manifest even in the case of a young child. A man once told me that his first sight of the interior of York Minster as a child had left an impression upon his mind which was ineffaceable. So it is with many lesser churches. Whatever the influence of a bare Calvinistic conventicle upon a devout Huguenot, it will have no such effect upon a child. One child known to me, who

<sup>1</sup> F. Heiler, *The Spirit of Worship*, p. 97.

was always reverent in church, on entering a chapel for the first time climbed over the pews and laughed and talked. When rebuked by her father, she said that God was not here. Even so, Fr. Tyrrell said that at an early age, 'the difference between an altar and a communion table was infinite.'<sup>1</sup>

The impression which is made by magnificent architecture is due in part at least to sheer size. Probably Otto is right when he suggests that the reason for the size of the ancient monoliths, as at Stonehenge for example, is that they were deliberately fashioned in order to impress the imagination by the power of hugeness.<sup>2</sup> Moreover there can be little doubt that the effects of light and shade in a church or a temple have a great power over the imagination. There is incontestably a great truth in the epithet 'a dim, religious light.' The interplay of light and shade in a Gothic cathedral may have an almost magical effect upon the imagination.

Since this is so, it is sheer folly to ignore the influence of architecture in the construction of churches. Other things being equal, a "numinous" building is an enormous asset. If it be objected that the primary purpose of erecting a beautiful church is not to impress the imagination of man but to glorify God, we shall answer that beyond question this is true ; so true indeed that unless this is the motive in the mind of the architect, the building will never have that uplifting power which we desiderate. The required effect upon the worshipper can be obtained only as a kind of by-product when the chief objective is the glory of God. Nevertheless this by-product is important and is by no means to be neglected.

<sup>1</sup> George Tyrrell, *Autobiography*, vol. i. p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> See R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 68.

To a great extent, indeed, it is not under the control of the priest. He must needs minister in the church to which he is appointed, even though it be more like a prison or a barrack than a church. Yet it behoves him always to remember that it is possible to make the most (or the least) of his place of worship. He should endeavour to stir the imagination of the worshippers as far as may be by the furnishing of his church. Such ornaments as altar lights, sanctuary lamps, pictures, flowers, and (when local prejudice is not likely to be too seriously affronted) images<sup>1</sup> and eikons, may be a great asset. A lamp burning continuously to symbolise the presence of God with His people has also a considerable power in impressing the imagination.

In this connexion a word may be said about the use of incense. The prejudice which exists against this is one of the strangest and most irrational in existence. If anything is doctrinally harmless, it is incense. It has no specific significance whatever, except as a symbol of something in which every Christian believes, namely, the ascending of prayer to the throne of God. Nor is it rightly to be specifically associated with the Roman Church. Nevertheless the prejudice against it does exist, and, when it is strong, the attempt to impress the imagination by means of it is plainly futile. At the same time, a little plain teaching about its practical importance will cause no difficulty, and as a rule do something to remove the prejudice against it. For in truth the case for the use of incense in churches is very strong indeed. We have seen that the imagination works through the senses. The appeal to the eye, to the ear and to the touch, is universally recognised as forming a

<sup>1</sup> "The Crucifix is the collective sin of the world made visible."—G. Tyrrell, *External Religion*, p. 33, quoted by J. B. Pratt, *The Religious Consciousness*, p. 287.

legitimate part of religious worship, but for some strange reason the appeal to the nose is to be excluded. Yet the olfactory imagination is one of the most important from the point of view of psychology, and incense has a powerful religious association. It is true that exception is often taken to it on the ground that the smell is disliked. One suspects that this is a rationalisation pure and simple.<sup>1</sup> In itself the smell of incense has from earliest times approved itself to the human nose. It was indeed selected for use in social intercourse precisely for the same reason as Eau de Cologne or Lavender are used by ourselves,—because of its refreshing effect. In course of time it came to be associated especially with religion, and to-day it has predominantly that association. This is, from the point of view of worship, a great advantage. It is therefore to be hoped that the day will come when its psychological value as an adjunct of worship will be universally recognised.

The precise 'use' of incense to be followed in church comes rather under the heading of ceremonial, and need not concern us here. It is, however, worth remarking that it is possible to use incense in a church apart altogether from service times. In this way the atmosphere is sweetened and the olfactory imagination is stirred. More than once it has happened that, when a church had in this way been 'fumigated' with incense, the pleasant smell has been commented upon by some innocent worshipper, who has been quite indignant when he has been told what it is!<sup>2</sup> In the case of one English cathedral it is common knowledge

<sup>1</sup> A 'rationalisation' consists in finding respectable reasons for beliefs which are due to prejudice, usually unconscious.

<sup>2</sup> Contrariwise, Dr. W. E. Orchard cites the case of a lady who, after attending service at the King's Weigh House, remarked that the incense had nearly made her sick, although it had not been used in the church 'for a month or more.'—*From Faith to Faith*, p. 140.

that the use of incense out of service times for fumigating purposes has had a very marked effect in the more reverent behaviour of the visitors and sightseers.

*Ceremonial.* Ceremonial must be distinguished (as popularly it is not) from ritual. Ceremonial is a form of action. Ritual is a form of words. A 'ritualist' is therefore, properly speaking, a person who indulges in an excess of forms of words and not necessarily one who makes use of elaborate ceremonial. Whether we like it or not, however, the use of ceremonial in worship is an unavoidable necessity, for it is nothing else than the part taken by the body in it. We cannot jump out of our skins even when we pray. Neither pastor nor people can dispense with it. In conducting public service the former must enter the church (even though it be called a 'steeple-house') and his body must take part in the service. This constitutes for him the ceremonial of the service. The same, *mutatis mutandis*, applies to the man in the pew. The only question that arises is what *kind* of ceremonial they are respectively to adopt.

The answer which our present enquiry suggests is evidently that it should be such as to assist the imagination of the worshipper. It may be objected that worship is for the glory of God rather than the edification of the worshipper, and therefore that the purpose of the ceremonial is to offer beautiful worship to God. That is beyond question true. Yet since worship of the heart is what God primarily desires, it cannot be right to offer elaborate service at the expense of the interior worship of the heart. (How this in fact may occur we shall discuss in a moment.) The conclusion to be drawn, therefore, is that, since there are varieties of temperament, variety of worship is a necessity. Nothing is more foolish than to endeavour to stereotype forms of

service in a rigid uniformity. Few things are more harmful to true religion than acrimonious disputes about forms and ceremonies. As St. Paul says in another connexion, "Let not him that eateth condemn him that eateth not." It is important, however, to remember that the difference between one kind of ceremonial and another is largely qualitative rather than quantitative. For example, people sometimes say, in expressing their preference for the use of a black gown to a surplice, that they like a 'simple' service; but a black gown is no simpler than a surplice, nor is there 'less' ceremonial involved in its use; it is merely different, and it is nothing but slipshod thinking to call it simpler.

Let each man be fully persuaded in his own mind, as St. Paul would say. In order to attain this state of mind, however, there are certain considerations in connexion with ceremonial which should be carefully weighed. The imagination is greatly influenced by the actions of the body. It is a well-known fact that the movements of the body affect a person's general state of mind. For instance, if feeling despondent one wills to turn up the corners of the mouth, an instantaneous effect is experienced; a more cheerful feeling arises. In like manner to shake one's fist makes one feel angry, to snarl makes one feel scornful, and so on. William James was so greatly impressed with such facts as these that he put forward his famous theory that these outward acts constitute the sum and substance of emotion. Without endorsing this extreme view, the fact cannot be disputed that, generally speaking, to kneel makes one feel humble and reverent, whereas to lounge makes one feel careless.

These facts are well known to actors. They experience the emotions which they portray. The greater the actor, the more true does this become. In fact, herein is the

difference between a first-rate and a third-rate actor. The former contrives to express and to experience to the full all the states of mind which he portrays ; the latter endeavours to depict states of mind without experiencing them. In these states of mind imagination is of fundamental importance. A good actor is able to put himself in the place of the character which he impersonates. He achieves this by 'suiting the word to the action, and the action to the word.' The performance of the appropriate action is an essential element in the process of mastering the part. Otherwise the imagination of the actor would never be captured by it. Furthermore, it is almost too obvious to mention that the seeing of the play stirs the imagination of the audience as no amount of reading of it would do.

The bearing of all this upon the ceremonial of worship is very great. We may here conveniently observe two distinctions which are not always made. We may distinguish between (a) the ceremonial of the ministers, and (b) the ceremonial of the worshippers in the pews. In regard to (a), the influence of this upon the imagination of the worshippers is immense, to say nothing of the ministers themselves. In the case of some persons, elaborate ceremonial greatly assists the mind and lifts it up to God. Eye, ear and nose all conspire to elevate the worshipper. The supreme instance of this in Christian worship is afforded by the Holy Eucharist. Herein lies the great power of the Roman Mass. We may here quote Heiler.

"The Roman liturgy is a great Mystery-drama with many acts. It is not so much the individual Mass which has this character—though the symbolism of the Middle Ages did as a matter of fact interpret the separate ceremonies of the Mass as separate acts in the story of Christ's Life and Passion—but rather the Church's year as a whole.

The great world-drama of the story of salvation, from its prologue in the Messianic hope of the Chosen People to its epilogue in the Second Coming of Christ unrolls itself, in the Festal periods and days of the Church year, before the eyes of the faithful. By the special colour of the priestly vestments, by the varying melodies of the chants, by the choice of the Scripture lessons—by means of all these the Roman Church enables the faithful to follow inwardly the successive acts of the story of salvation, giving to each its appropriate tone of feeling : the quiet joy of Christmastide, the deeper seriousness of the Passion-week, the mourning of Good Friday, the jubilant gladness of the Easter Day, the spiritual power of the Feast of Pentecost. There is nothing more characteristic of Roman Catholic religious life at its higher levels than the constant ‘living’ of the Church year, which makes the history of salvation a thing of the immediate present. An outstanding feature of the great drama of the Church year is the Passion liturgy—that pearl of the Roman service—with its dramatic representation of successive incidents of the Passion story : the Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, in the Palm procession of Palm Sunday ; the Last Supper, in the Communion of the priests on Maundy Thursday. Still more pictorial are the Foot-washing on the Thursday, the unveiling of the Cross on Good Friday, and the lighting of the Lumen Christi on Easter Eve. The Passion, Death, and Resurrection are thus set before the eyes of the people in vivid symbolic acts.”<sup>1</sup>

Within this great ‘Cathedral of the Liturgy,’ as Heiler calls it, popular religion has set up many side-chapels as it were, which contain their own statues and pictures and altars. This constitutes both a strength and a weakness. Its strength is that it gives to simple minds a hold upon religion which is apt to be sadly lacking in Anglicanism and in Protestantism. Its weakness is that it is likely to do so at the price of debasing the quality of the religion, which may

<sup>1</sup> F. Heiler, *op. cit.* pp. 59-60.

easily degenerate into practical polytheism, or even into magic.

There are indeed some, as we have already said, who find a service of an elaborate kind 'distracting.' This raises a question which needs far more careful investigation than it has so far received. It is commonly assumed that antipathy to ceremonial is innate and temperamental in certain individuals. That it is so in some instances is probable, though not certain. It is likely, however, that the proportion of them is comparatively small. In any case the common assumption that such dislike is necessarily innate is altogether groundless. The probability rather is that in the majority of instances dislike of ceremonial is the offspring of prejudice pure and simple, for it often happens that those who object to what is miscalled 'ritualism' love to listen to the most elaborate music. But music is only the ceremonial of the ear, and in the present state of our knowledge there is not sufficient reason for saying that a person is temperamentally unable to worship by means of the ceremonial of the eye if he finds the ceremonial of the ear so greatly helpful. The whole question requires careful experimental psychological investigation.

We now come to the ceremonial of the individual worshipper. When the question of ceremonial is discussed, this is commonly overlooked, and attention is confined to the behaviour of the ministers. This, however, is obviously to make a great mistake. Since the worshipper has a body, he must needs adopt some form of ceremonial in worship. In other words, he must do something with it. The most strict Puritan is no exception to this. When he prays he must either stand, sit, kneel, or adopt the strange squatting attitude which is so familiar to us all. As ceremonies, there is nothing to choose between them from the point of view

of simplicity. It is no simpler to squat than to kneel. It is merely different. In deciding which of the two postures to adopt, the question which should be settled is, Which affects the imagination most ' religiously ' ? This is only another way of asking which is the most appropriate. The answer in this case is hardly in doubt. Kneeling suggests to the imagination of the worshipper self-abasement and reverence. Consequently it makes it easier for him to lift up his mind to God. Squatting, on the other hand, suggests nothing to do with religion, unless it is Adam hiding himself from God among the trees of the garden. Kneeling, indeed, is physically somewhat of a strain, but this must not be allowed to bring it into discredit. All that is necessary is that it should be remembered that practice is required in kneeling as in everything else before facility can be obtained. If this were borne in mind, much failure and disappointment in worship would be avoided.

The ceremonial of the individual worshipper, however, is not confined to kneeling. He also stands and sits at stated times. Moreover, he controls (or should control) the movement of his eyes. This last is an important part of worship. The practice (adopted by so many) of gazing about the church during divine worship is fatal to true devotion.<sup>1</sup> This holds good also of the time immediately prior to the beginning of the service. The worshipper should be taught to guard his eyes carefully during the service itself. When he is kneeling in prayer, his eyes should normally be closed. When he is sitting or standing, he should beware of being distracted. This undoubtedly is where the great advantage of a well-ordered service comes in. The eye of the wor-

<sup>1</sup> In particular should the clergy bear in mind how distracting, both to themselves and to the congregation, is the practice of looking round during the service to see who is there.

shipper is then held by sights well calculated to inspire reverence and to lift his mind to God. On the other hand, when the service is slipshod and inartistic, the eye diverts the mind from the path of worship.

There is, indeed, no necessity for ceremonial to be elaborate. In the average parish church it had better not be, inasmuch as the necessary conditions for elaborate worship are usually wanting. Especially does this apply to the ceremonial of elaborate music. The attempt made by many choirs to render such is in fact nothing but naughty pride. It is, however, too frequently assumed that simple ceremonial is the same as slipshod ceremonial. On the contrary, a 'plain' service requires to be as carefully planned and as reverently carried out as does the most elaborate. Moreover, it is necessary continually to guard against the danger (already mentioned) of confusing simplicity with something else. It is, for example, not a simpler ceremonial to lounge at the altar or to wriggle in a non-committal way before it than it is to stand erect and still before a specified point of it ; but the former is aesthetically and ceremonially bad whereas the latter is good, for movement in worship should never be idle movement. When it is made, it should be deliberate and for a purpose, otherwise it is artistically bad, for as Croce has convincingly shown, the essence of art is expression. Good art expresses exactly the mind of the artist. The style is the man. Bad art, on the other hand, either expresses nothing at all, or else it exaggerates. That is why many persons at first prefer bad art to good. Their powers of perception are too blunt to sense the finer shades of meaning, and so they have a preference for the cruder forms of expression both in colour and in sound. In the ordering of services, all exaggerated and meaningless forms of expression should be avoided.

Everything should bear the mark of discipline and restraint. Above all, no movement or action should take place without a good reason. The fact that the vicar 'likes it' is emphatically not a sufficient reason, nor is the plea, 'We have always done this.'

We must return, however, to the individual worshipper. All the movements and dispositions of his body during the service are important as either aids or hindrances to devotion. He cannot afford to be careless about them. Nor can he afford to ignore any bodily acts of devotion which may assist him. The making of the sign of the cross is a case in point. We may be thankful indeed that this ancient and beautiful piece of Christian symbolism was deliberately retained in the Book of Common Prayer, and that in spite of opposition. Those upon whose brow this sign has been made in Holy Baptism can scarcely be wrong if they make it upon themselves when they come to years of discretion.

Again, the worshipper will be better able to bow his heart if he makes the practice of bowing his head and his knees. At the words of the Creed which begin 'And was incarnate' the reverently bowed knee will do more than many sermons to bring home to the imagination the wonder of the Incarnation.<sup>1</sup> Likewise when going up to receive the Blessed Sacrament, instead of standing in a queue (still less, gazing about), as so many do, it is a great aid to the imagination to adopt a kneeling posture until the time to move forward arrives.<sup>2</sup> These and other bodily acts will do much to

<sup>1</sup> Liturgical purists should remember that the verdict of psychology is entirely in favour of the practice of genuflexion, as against bowing, because, as experience plainly shows, it makes a more reverential impression upon imagination. Bowing for any length of time, indeed, may easily strike the imagination as being ridiculous.

<sup>2</sup> This is especially the case when there is only one administrant.

assist the worshipper to maintain that calm and heavenly frame which is the essence of true adoration. We cannot afford to dispense with the assistance of our bodies in the spiritual life. It is far too difficult. The learning of outward acts of reverence on the part of the average worshipper is one of the most urgent needs of Anglicanism. It is psychologically certain that unless we can teach people to be reverent with their bodies, we shall never teach the majority to be reverent in their minds. *Solvitur ambulando.*

When we enquire as to the best method by which this reverence can be taught, the answer is not doubtful. Much the easiest and most effective way of doing this is in childhood. For, to quote Professor J. B. Pratt, "before an object or act can become a religious symbol to a man it must have entered into the emotional texture of his religious life" and "it is seldom after those formative years that the close association between object and emotion can be wrought which is essential to religious symbolism."<sup>1</sup> This testimony is true at any rate to the extent that symbolical habits acquired in early life have a peculiar force and power, and frequently prevent a child from being altogether lost to religion. It is, however, probably an exaggeration to suggest, as Pratt does, that ceremonial acts and habits formed in later life never acquire the same power. After some years of practice they may well do so, at any rate in some cases. Nevertheless the fact of the supreme importance of childhood in this matter remains,<sup>2</sup> and it should cause those who are managers of what are known as 'Church Schools' furiously to think. Beyond

<sup>1</sup> J. B. Pratt, *op. cit.* p. 286.

<sup>2</sup> It is significant that Keble and Pusey learnt English Catholicism at their mother's knee, whereas Newman did not:

question, the primary object of these schools is to capture the child's imagination for the Church ; all else is utterly subordinate to this. How many of those who control our Church Schools are even aware of this, to say nothing of striving to achieve it ?

*Ritual.* Ritual is of two kinds, liturgical and non-liturgical. The attempt to pit the one against the other is somewhat futile. Plainly there is room for both in public worship. It is the actual words used, whether ordered or extempore, which are most important. There are two dangers which have to be avoided here. The first is that of an undue subjectivity, that is, the making use of words and phrases which lay too much emphasis upon the worshipper. There are, for example, far too many hymns of a subjective nature sung. The traditional prayers of the Church from the Lord's Prayer downwards are a valuable corrective. Since worship is directed to God, the purpose of the words used should be to direct the imagination to Him. Epithets should be employed which are calculated to fill the imagination with right ideas of Him. The ancient Collect form, which usually opens with some kind of mental picture of God, is psychologically admirable. So are the Church's ancient hymns of praise, such as the *Gloria in Excelsis* and the *Te Deum*. In all of these the imagination is lifted up to God. There can be little doubt that acts of this kind should be far more widely used than is at present the case.

The other danger of which to beware is the use of abstract rather than imaginal language. While it is true that the worshipper should have some theoretical grasp of his religion, it is also true that in the end *omnia exeunt in mysterium*. The great mysteries of the Faith can never be exhausted by the categories of human thought. Hence

recourse must always be made in the end to symbolical or pictorial language. The Babe of Bethlehem is greater than all theories of the Incarnation, and the Cross is greater than all theories of the Atonement. *Accedit verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum*, said Luther, quoting Saint Augustine. True, but the 'Word' here is not an abstract concept, but the 'Word made flesh.'

The tendency to overlook this has constituted the chief weakness of Protestant worship, which has always tended to neglect the imaginative appeal of the Incarnation and to substitute for it the conceptual appeal of sermons and theological thought. This has led many wrongly to suppose that the power of the sacraments is coincident with man's ability to understand them.<sup>1</sup>

This weakness of much Protestant worship is to some extent counterbalanced in Calvinism by its emphasis upon the majesty of God. Herein lies the strength of the Calvinistic appeal to God's majesty and inscrutability. As an abstract concept, the doctrine of predestination is revolting and un-Christian in the extreme, but regarded as an imaginative representation of the transcendent power of God, contrasted with the littleness of man, its force is undeniable ; and beyond question it represents a necessary and a permanent element in man's apprehension of God.

One element of great importance in the conduct of worship is silence. Spaces of silence in the course of a rite are of immense value. During these times suggestions may be given to guide the imagination during the period of silence. The worshipper may be bidden to call up various mental pictures and to dwell upon them. Yet silence has an even greater power than this. When it supervenes upon

<sup>1</sup> It is much to be wished that this point were given more emphasis in discussions on the right age for confirmation.

a flow of praise and prayer, it may by its very nature and existence have an immense power of impressing the imagination with the presence of God, Who transcends all human powers of expression. Such was evidently the still, small voice which was heard at Horeb by the prophet Elijah. This voice, in the literal rendering of the Hebrew words, was 'a sound of gentle stillness.'<sup>1</sup>

We have thus far spoken of public worship. The same principles will hold good, *mutatis mutandis*, of private prayer and devotion, with two exceptions. In the first place, extempore non-liturgical prayer in public worship is one thing, and extempore prayer in private is another. When the worshipper is his own minister, any drawback there may be to public extempore prayer plainly ceases to exist. Nothing but good, therefore, can come if he strives to lift his mind to God by means of words which he himself formulates. Further, he will find it a very great assistance to make a practice, whenever possible, of saying his private prayers aloud. He will then have the added assistance of the auditory imagination.

There is, however, another and a more important difference between public and private worship. As the worshipper advances in the spiritual life, he gradually learns to dispense with the use of mental images. All that has been said thus far on the subject of worship holds good only of the lower reaches of the spiritual life. In the ordering of the public services of the Church it is obviously necessary to remain at these levels. In the higher stages of prayer, however, as in the higher stages of thought generally, the mind ceases to be dependent upon the use of images.<sup>2</sup> The soul enters into God, and God enters into the soul, in a way

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings xix. 12 (R.V. margin).

<sup>2</sup> See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIa, 2ae, 15. 3.

which no imagery can express ; but unfortunately the vast majority of worshippers have not attained that level.

Something may be said, finally, about the danger of idolatry in connexion with the *diction* used in public worship. There can be no doubt whatever, as our present enquiry has plainly shown, that words, as a result of long association, have a very strong imaginative appeal. For example, the word ' Mass ' is as a red rag to a bull in the eyes of many Englishmen. On the other hand, to others it is the hall-mark of orthodoxy. In like manner, among old-fashioned Evangelicals such phrases as ' the precious Blood,' ' salvation,' ' assurance,' and the like are charged with imaginative imagery highly coloured in the extreme. They become the standards of orthodoxy.

It is surely the duty of the parish priest to warn his people against this false worship of the mental image. He should take pains to point out that an image which exists solely in the mind may be as much an idol as one which exists in the outer world. Moreover, it is more dangerous, because it is more subtle. For one civilised person who is deceived by an objective material image, a hundred are led astray by a mental image. The priest will, therefore, tell his people of this danger, which is so easily and so frequently overlooked. But he will do more than that. He will endeavour in his teaching and in his ordering of the services to obviate this danger as much as possible by avoiding *clichés* and catch-words, which so easily deceive even the elect. To this end he will deliberately vary his terminology as, for example, by not adhering to one single name for the Lord's Service, (whether it be the ' Mass ' or the ' Lord's Supper '), but by availing himself of the variety of terminology which is put at his disposal by Christian tradition. In this way he will give the congregation (albeit unconsciously in their regard)

many different pictures of a great subject. They will, as it were, learn to 'walk round about it and tell the towers thereof,' instead of being slaves, as so many are, to one limited view-point. Moreover, to significant words and phrases which necessarily recur frequently because they are embodied in the liturgy, the wise priest will endeavour to attach the greatest possible number of pictures that he can find. In this way he will seek to avoid the imparting of a narrow and confined outlook to the minds of his people.

It may perhaps be objected that the price of cultivating such width of the imagination will be a weakening of the power of the imagery employed. It may be said that it is precisely repetition of the *same* picture which impresses the imagination, and that this is proved by methods of advertisers, in which the self-same picture is displayed before the public eye from a thousand hoardings. It is quite true that it is necessary thus to display the same picture (whether mental or material) many times before it makes much impression upon the average mind. If a number of pictures are displayed at the same time, they suffer what is known as 'interference' from one another. Consequently it is wise to impress one particular picture strongly upon the mind before passing on to another. At the same time, there is need for variety. When one picture has been firmly established in the mind, then the monotony of constant repetition is apt to produce weariness and boredom. Advertising agents show that they are fully aware of this by never allowing the same picture to remain too long in the public eye. If, therefore, the priest seeks to vary in this kind of way the mental pictures which he displays before the minds of his flock, he will not only produce a wider outlook in their minds, but he will also be acting according to the dictates of a sound psychology.

In determining the influence of words upon imagination one caution is particularly necessary to be observed. Etymology is a very unreliable guide. It is common to hear people defending or attacking the use of a particular word by appealing to its derivation. This is altogether beside the point. The significance of a word does not lie in the picture which it called up in the mind of man a hundred years ago any more than a photograph taken of a person in infancy is a reliable guide to his appearance at maturity. The significance of a word, so far as the vast majority of persons is concerned, consists solely in the *current* imaginative picture which it arouses in the mind. A good instance of this confusion is afforded by the word 'Mass,' of which we have already spoken. It is frequently defended on the ground that etymologically it means nothing specifically Roman. That contention is quite irrelevant. In practice its meaning is determined by the mental pictures which it calls up in the mind. If we enquire what these pictures are, there can be only one answer. They are of the rites and ceremonies of Holy Communion as celebrated by the Roman Church. Be it noted that I am not attacking the use of this word. It may be a very right and proper thing for Anglicans and others in speaking of Holy Communion to use a word which draws attention to the fact that it is (however different in detail) essentially one and the same service as the Roman Mass : but let not such usage be defended on the ground that there is nothing specifically Roman about the word.

There is one other fundamental element in worship which requires a little further consideration. This is music. It does not, however, constitute a fresh category over and above those which have already been mentioned. Music, as such, is merely a specific form of ceremonial, *viz.* the

ceremonial of the ear. Programme music is, in addition, a form of ritual. It is claimed by some persons that music has the power of calling up spontaneously (and not merely by association) mental pictures. It is very doubtful, however, to what extent this is the case.<sup>1</sup> In any event the primary appeal of music is to the auditory imagination, although there is a subsidiary and by no means unimportant appeal to the kinaesthetic imagination.<sup>2</sup> In the case of a highly musical person these varieties of imagination have all the advantages and the disadvantages which visual imagery has for the average person. Beyond question music has an immense power of leading the mind to the supernatural. At the same time, there lurks here a very subtle danger of idolatry. Even with a person not gifted musically this is the case. Favourite tunes may do much to hinder a soul's spiritual advance. They may easily come to be regarded as the indispensable means of approach to God. There are some who resist a new tune as vigorously (and as unintelligently) as a fresh piece of visual symbolism. Such persons need to be reminded that in heaven, according to the writer of the Revelation of St. John, they will be required to 'learn a new hymn.'<sup>3</sup> Progress is the law of life in this as in all other spheres of imagination.

<sup>1</sup> When it occurs, this power is known to psychologists as synaesthesia, which may, of course, be either associative or spontaneous.

<sup>2</sup> See article by J. J. Mainwaring, "Kinaesthetic Factors in the Recall of Musical Experience," *British Journal of Psychology*, January 1933.

<sup>3</sup> Revelation v. 9.

## CHAPTER VII

### IMAGINATION IN PREACHING

For preaching there are three requirements,—a preacher, a congregation and a sermon. Our subject therefore falls naturally under these three headings.

*The Preacher.* In very truth the preacher *is* the sermon. We read that ‘John the Baptist came preaching.’ That is to say, the figure of the man was an inseparable part of the message. With his rough, hairy, prophet’s mantle, and his rude diet, he had gripped the popular imagination. Consequently vast crowds turned up to listen to his message. ‘All men counted John a prophet.’ This is an instance of something universal. A forcible personality will always make a forcible preacher, because it will capture the imagination of the hearers. It may be confidently believed that neither broadcasting, nor television, will ever oust the preacher from his position, because these mechanical devices lack the power of personality.

Nevertheless the possession of a strong personality is not enough to make a truly powerful preacher. It may, indeed, be definitely harmful, unless it be a sanctified personality. If it is not, the preacher will proclaim himself instead of proclaiming Christ. Some powerful preachers have apparently achieved but little. This is due to the fact that they have obtruded their personalities upon their hearers instead of being content to be the instruments of the Holy Spirit. They may indeed have preached Christ in so many words (although they have not always done even this), but their unsanctified personality has practically

obliterated their message. Emerson says in one of his essays, "What you are shouts so loudly that I cannot hear what you say."

✓ The primary requisite, then, if Christ is to capture men's imagination—and this is the object of all Christian preaching—is that the preacher should be a man of God. He must say his prayers and be often on his knees ; then he will preach 'as one having authority and not as the scribes.' He will *suggest* God to his flock. This is the only way indeed in which God can be brought to men. By reason of His very greatness He cannot be comprehended or put into a logical concept or an argument. If He is to be brought to men at all, it can only be by means of what we call suggestion. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this in preaching. It is this unconscious influence which is the chief factor in capturing the imagination of a congregation. Of the greatest of all figures in the Old Testament we read that he 'wist not that the skin of his face shone.' This object is more likely to be achieved if the preacher will take heed to George Herbert's advice and in the course of the sermon "turn often and make many apostrophes to God as 'O Lord, bless my people and teach them this point,' or, 'O my Master, on Whose errand I come, let me hold my peace, and speak Thyself.' Some such orisons scattered in the sermon, carry great holiness in them." <sup>1</sup>

✓ To this end it is essential, however, not only that the preacher should be a man of God, but also that his imagination should be filled with the importance and dignity of his task. It is a great work upon which he is engaged, and he must beware of minimising it. Many clergy spoil their chance of ever realising the true significance of preaching by allowing their imagination to become biased against it.

<sup>1</sup> George Herbert, *A Priest to the Temple*, ch. 7.

They complain of the unpleasant necessity of having to preach so often or even at all. They protest that sermons are futile, or they indulge in the foolish habit of disparaging preaching in contrast to Eucharistic worship. This habit of praising one thing at the expense of another is a very characteristic human infirmity, upon which Bishop Butler remarked as follows : " It is one of the peculiar weaknesses of human nature when, upon comparison of two things, one is found to be of greater importance than the other, to consider this other as of scarcely any importance at all." <sup>1</sup>

If, on the contrary, the imagination of the preacher is filled with the thought of the greatness of his task, he will tend correspondingly to impress the imagination of his hearers. In order that this may come to pass there are two chief requirements. First, let him never preach a single word which he does not utterly believe. The absolute sincerity of the preacher captures the imagination of the congregation even when they would otherwise be in violent opposition. " I disagreed with almost every word you said, and yet I would not have had you say anything different " ; thus it was said to one preacher, who was impressive in his sincerity. It is related that a friend one day met David Hume, the historian and philosopher, hurrying along the streets of London, and asked him where he was going. Hume replied that he was going to hear George Whitfield preach. The friend, remembering that Hume was none too friendly to Christianity, said, " Surely you do not believe what Whitfield is preaching, do you ? " " No," replied Hume, " but he does." <sup>2</sup>

In the second place, let not the preacher adopt an apologetic manner, as some are wont to do. The gospel needs

<sup>1</sup> Butler, *Analogy of Religion*, pt. II. ch. i.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by James Black, *The Mystery of Preaching*, p. 45.

no apology. The preacher is there as the ambassador of the greatest One who has ever walked the earth. The word which he declares is the word of the Lord. It is the grasping of this essential truth which has been the driving force of the immensely influential Barthian movement in Germany. Consequently the preacher should expect his people to listen, and show by his whole manner that he intends them to do so. If they do not, it will be his fault. It is related that in a certain church in the Highlands, to which a visiting preacher went, the beadle approached the latter and said, "If I see anyone asleep during the sermon, shall I go and shake them?" ; to which the minister replied, "No, shake me."

*The Congregation.* We have said that the preacher is the sermon. That is obviously too narrow a definition. The sermon is the preacher plus the congregation, or, to put it in another way, it is the relation between the two. This relationship is a very delicate thing. It depends upon the congregation, of course, but it depends even more upon the preacher. It depends, in fact, upon the picture of the congregation which the preacher has in his imagination, for that picture ultimately determines the idea which the congregation has of the preacher. One who was accustomed to hear Father Dolling when he went to preach to the boys at Winchester used to say that what made the boys listen primarily was not anything that Dolling said, so much as the fact that they knew that if any one of them sank to the lowest depths of depravity and sin, Dolling would go down and try to save them. Such was the picture which they believed Dolling had of them, and such must always be the picture in the mind of the Christian preacher, for so it was with the Lord Himself. We read that "when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them,

because they were distressed and scattered as sheep not having a shepherd.”<sup>1</sup> The very sight of the crowds thus impressed our Lord and touched His heart. It is surely no accident that in two of the greatest of the gospel parables, the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son, we find that same word ‘moved with compassion’ used. We read of the good Samaritan that when he saw the wounded man, ‘he was moved with compassion.’<sup>2</sup> Likewise we read of the prodigal son; ‘while he was yet far off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion.’<sup>3</sup> This picture is derived from belief in the infinite importance of the human soul. Above all others, it should dominate the preacher’s imagination. “When it is largely present,” wrote Phillips Brooks, “it is surprising how many deficiencies count for nothing.”<sup>4</sup>

There are two requirements in order that this picture may dominate the preacher’s imagination. In the first place, he must be able imaginatively to put himself in the place of his hearers. Bishop King used to say that preaching is like a game of dominoes. “Six is a very good number, but if the other man has a two, it is no use whatever.” Some men have the gift of intuitively discerning the minds of their hearers and putting themselves in their place. Where this capacity exists in a high degree, we have what is called an orator. In this connexion we must bear in mind the advice of Bishop Dupanloup.

“The true popularity of preaching consists less in its phrases than in its thoughts, its sentiments, its earnestness; and when these are true, natural, and such as come home to those addressed, the real end of eloquence is attained, and sometimes its highest point of excellence. The grand criterion

<sup>1</sup> Matthew ix. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Luke x. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Luke xv. 20.

<sup>4</sup> *Lectures on Preaching*, p. 255.

for ascertaining if one possesses a truly popular mode of preaching, and the best means of attaining it, is what I may call the *keeping touch of the audience* ; it is to go to seek one's own words in the souls that are listening to us ; it is to feel and to see what suits an audience or what does not suit it ; what it is waiting for, what it desires, what will make an impression upon it, and touch it to the very heart. And, in fact, whatever fine things we may be able to say without doing this, we are losing our time and our trouble, and doing no good whatever, if our discourse is not *opportune*, 'in season', as the Scripture says ; and if, in default of that, all that we say glides over the surface of souls without penetrating into them. . . . Ask of the orators who are truly popular their secret, and they have no other than this. For it is in this respect that a true orator differs from a mere rhetorician : the latter seeks in his own mind, and in that alone, what he ought to say, without troubling himself otherwise about those to whom he is going to speak : the orator seeks it, before all, in the minds and souls of his hearers." <sup>1</sup>

One American preacher, known to the author, was in the habit of casting aside at the last minute the sermon that he had prepared, and preaching something quite different on the spur of the moment. On such occasions he remarked, "I knew that they did not want what I had prepared to give them." Herein is the overwhelming advantage of what is called (sometimes rather misleadingly) extempore preaching.

Those who have not the gifts which make this possible, however, can achieve a similar result by another route, namely, faithful pastoral visitation. In the last resort, the devoted parish priest carries far greater weight and influence with his flock than any outside preacher, however learned and however eloquent. If, from day to day, he is

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Dupanloup, Preface to *The Ministry of Preaching*.

in and out of the houses of his flock, he will come to know their minds, and so when he stands up to preach he will be able to speak to their hearts. Preaching and pastoral visitation beyond question go hand in hand. Would that all parochial clergy remembered that it is this constant intercourse between priest and people which gives that indefinable imaginative background which makes the true sermon.<sup>1</sup> That is why the parish priest should really make the best preacher ; and, when he is faithful, he does. As the people in Lancashire are wont to say, ' We like our own best.'

Further than this, the faithful pastor not only visits his flock ; he serves them, and there is nothing like such service for kindling the heart and filling the imagination with appropriate pictures. The hireling will never gain this compelling picture which makes the true preacher, because he has no love for his sheep. In the mind of the true pastor, however, it will arise spontaneously.

Nevertheless it is not enough for the preacher to be able thus to picture the actual lives, thoughts and circumstances of his hearers. He must see them not merely as they are, but as they ought to be ; as they will be when God has perfected His work in them. It is his duty to inspire them with a vision of their own possibilities. Phillips Brooks said that the clergy have as a rule " too high an estimate of men's present condition, and too low an estimate of their possibility." <sup>2</sup> It was characteristic of our Lord that He saw men not as they were, but as they might be. He saw

<sup>1</sup> Objection is sometimes made to pastoral visitation on the ground that when conducted in the daytime it consists solely in visiting women. It would be interesting to know whether the objectors have become more diligent in pastoral visitation in these days of unemployment when men are to be found at home in large numbers all day long.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 81.

in the impetuous and unstable man Simon the rock man Peter, just as the sculptor sees in the block of unhewn stone the perfect work of art. Such is the vision which love gives ; and it is this very vision which makes love at times seem severe. It is because of God's great love for men that He expects the highest from them, just as a good earthly father is not content with anything but the best for his children. Thus, immediately after Saint Peter had made the great confession of our Lord's Messiahship, He turned round and rebuked him and called him Satan, because He realised that he was tampering with the high possibilities which were in him. The preacher must always appeal to the highest in men and expect a response. If he does, he will get it. In other words, he must have in his mind a highly coloured picture of the possibilities in his hearers.

A picture of this kind, it is important to remember, must necessarily be intensely *individual*. It is not a generalised picture, for there are no crowds in the sight of God. Each single member of the flock will be thus regarded in the imagination of the preacher who is also a pastor. It is this personal individual note which gives sermons their greatest power. To quote Phillips Brooks again, "All successful preaching talks to individuals." <sup>1</sup> This was the chief secret of John Wesley's preaching. It was directed not to crowds, although they were present, but to every individual in the crowd. The preacher must in this way, as George Herbert says, "particularise in his speaking ; now to the younger folk, then to the elder, now to the poor, now to the rich ; ' this is for you,' ' and this is for you ' ; for particulars ever touch and awake more than generals." <sup>2</sup>

Thus to see the members of his congregation will save the preacher from two opposite snares. One is that of

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> George Herbert, *loc. cit.*

preaching an easy gospel which makes no demands upon men's consciences. If he really loves his flock, he will not be content with a low standard for them. The other snare is the habit which is specially liable to fasten upon the preacher who is just beginning his ministry,—that of scolding. This is a peculiarly misguided tendency, and its root lies in a faulty imaginative picture in the mind of the preacher. He sees his hearers as they are and condemns them out of hand. Did he but see them as God sees them, in a picture painted by infinite compassion, such a mistake would be impossible. Let him constantly imaginatively represent those to whom he speaks as earnest seekers after the truth, hungering and thirsting for better things.

The preacher's imagination, if it be rightly guided, will also enable him to see himself in a similar light. It will enable him frequently to realise his own need of God's compassion. It may even do a greater thing than this. It may enable him imaginatively to perceive the unspoken criticism which his hearers pass upon him. Not the least of the dangers which beset the preacher arises from the fact that he is often liable to escape the fire of criticism which is the lot of other public men. A sensitive imagination will in some degree make good this deficiency.

*The Sermon.* We have considered the preacher and the congregation. We now come to the sermon itself. As we have seen, this is constituted by the relation between the other two. In theory, a sermon might be preached by the bare presence of the preacher, or at least he might say very little. So we read that Saint John in his old age was carried into church on a bed, and said over and over again, "Little children, love one another." Perhaps there have been few sermons more impressive than this. In any case, the essential point is that whatever words are used by the

✓ preacher receive their power from this relationship. Eloquent words are quite useless if the preacher is out of sympathy with his hearers. He must be *en rapport* with them. In other words, the most vital power of preaching is the result of suggestion. Without entering into the difficult question as to the precise mode by which suggestion operates, it is sufficient to say that it works *via* imagination. To intrigue imagination, therefore, is the essence of a sermon. This is true of all teaching, because imagination determines interest. Still more is it true of preaching, for the object of the preacher is not merely to instruct but also to lead to a specific course of action and, as we have seen, imagination is the spring of action. On the other hand, the preacher should beware of attempting to catch the imagination of his hearers by 'stunts,' popular appeals and incessant searching after novelty. These have no permanent force. Only too frequently they are a substitute for spirituality which, as we have seen, is the secret of really sanctifying the imagination.

How, then, is this end to be achieved? Three points call for consideration :

- (a) the preparation of the sermon,
- (b) the substance of the sermon,
- (c) the delivery of the sermon.

It will be convenient to consider these three in the reverse order.

Under (c) we must, of course, include the preacher. The man, we have said, is the sermon. A bad man cannot preach a good sermon. It may be clever and able, but not *good*. The imagination of the congregation is subconsciously controlled by the personality of the preacher. If he be a man of God, he will to that extent speak with

authority. Bishop Dupanloup says, "To say wonderful things, but not to say them well, is to say nothing ; but to say little, and yet to say that well, that is much."<sup>1</sup> By 'well' Dupanloup refers to nothing less than the devotion of the preacher.

Imagination is also influenced by other factors. There is first the authority of the preacher's office. There is a dangerous tendency at the present time to minimise men's regard for this. Even in these democratic days, however, there is still a deep regard for the authority of the priesthood. One evidence of this is men's dislike of lay readers in comparison with the clergy. The priesthood captures the imagination ; the episcopate, still more. When a bishop stands up to preach, he has an immense initial advantage, though he may indeed cancel these assets by dullness or bad mannerisms.

This imaginative appeal which arises from the office of the preacher is reinforced by three things,—suitable clothes, suitable gestures and suitable speech. In preaching, clothes count for much more than is supposed. They tend to create that atmosphere of reverence and regard which makes the hearers receptive. An archbishop preaching in a frock coat would not impress the imagination. Indeed, he would be severely handicapped.

In like manner, gestures are important, at least negatively; that is to say, inappropriate gestures greatly distract the imagination of the hearers. Anything approaching to a mannerism will so arrest the imagination as to prevent the congregation from paying attention to the substance of the sermon. Appropriate gestures, on the other hand, are helpful, but it needs to be remembered that gesture is most forcible if it is restrained. It is pre-eminently true here that

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 186.

familiarity breeds contempt. Too much movement is apt to be dangerously distracting. Mr. James Black relates an incident in his own experience which is significant in this connexion.

“In my student days,” he writes, “I heard Principal John Caird preaching in the Bute Hall at Glasgow University. For the greater part of the sermon he stood in massive stillness, like a carved statue. Then at the end, he raised both hands slowly above his head, and finished with his hands up, standing silent for a moment. I was never so impressed by any gesture as by that single lonely action ! Its peculiar emphasis came from the fact that it stood out like a peak from a level plain.”<sup>1</sup>

The actual manner of delivery adopted, however, is the most important of all. Beyond question, sermons (with exceptions so rare as to be insignificant), if read, will not capture the imagination. The preacher should be characterised, as George Herbert quaintly says, “by a diligent and busy cast of his eyes on his auditors.”<sup>2</sup> This is the great advantage of extempore preaching, as we have seen. Moreover, the effect of the preacher’s looking at his hearers is considerable in its influence. But even more important than this is the immense power which a well-trained voice has over the auditory imagination.

If the preacher has due regard to the observation of these conditions, he may be tolerably certain of gaining a hearing. As we have said, he should expect to get it and not be content with coughing and inattention. Moreover, if he succeeds in intriguing the imagination of his hearers, then they will be ready to act.

(b) This brings us to the actual substance of the sermon. First, it is necessary to emphasise the vital importance of

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> *Loc. cit.*

the opening words. A sermon may even be made or marred by the first sentence. In the first few minutes everybody as a rule is prepared to listen, and if the imagination of the congregation can be captured then it is likely to be held throughout the sermon, provided that the latter be not too long. But if attention is lost in the first few moments, more likely than not it will never be regained.

Since the appeal is primarily to the imagination, the most important consideration in every sermon is that it should be concrete and, as it were, pictorial. As an Arab proverb says, "He is the best speaker who can turn the ear into an eye." To this end it is valuable for the preacher to have one main idea, or at least one definite subject, and to see it in his own mind as a whole. If it is possible thus to present it in the introduction to the sermon, it is usually an advantage to do so.

We may notice three chief ways in which the sermon may arrest the imagination. First, by means of form. The material should be clearly arranged. A shapeless sermon loses much of its effect. On the other hand, one that is shapely not only captures the imagination but also greatly assists the memory both of the preacher and of his hearers; form is therefore a doubly important factor. How it is to be achieved we shall consider in more detail under the heading of preparation, but one useful means may be mentioned here, namely, the text. The function of a text should be, as Phillips Brooks said, to act as a window through which people can look and see an idea of the sermon. Any text which does not fulfil this object is serving no useful purpose, and the preacher should not hesitate to dispense with it. Here it is important to remember the value of expository preaching, in which a text is interpreted in an orderly and successive manner. It is

rather surprising perhaps to those who have not tried, to discover how readily preaching of this kind gains a hearing. Doubtless this is partly due to the fact that such expository preaching is always possessed of form. It is prevented from being shapeless by being poured out of the mould of the text.

Secondly, concrete modes of expression, or, to put it otherwise, visual imagery should be used. These appeal even to the highly educated and are *essential* for the uneducated. Most sermons are far too abstract. The greatest Preacher of all should teach us this ; for our Lord's teaching is marvellously concrete and life-like. Hence the importance of apt illustrations : but they must be apt. We shall return to this under the heading of preparation, but it is important to notice here that sermons must not be allowed to degenerate into a string of stories. This is to make them trivial. They must be works of art. If there are many illustrations, these must be held together by a golden thread of thought.

In this connexion we must remind ourselves of the fact that imagination leads to action. Illustrations touch the heart in a way in which other forms of thought do not, and lead in consequence to action. Much of 'man's inhumanity to man' is due to a failure of imagination. Dr. Thouless rightly says : "The business man who practises and affects hardness in his actions with respect to employees would often not hesitate to give generously to one of them if he actually visited his home and saw his needs."<sup>1</sup> A striking instance of such deficiency of imagination was provided at the time of the Russian famine and the 'Save the Children Fund,' which was founded in that connexion. In spite of endless exhortations and appeals the money came in but

<sup>1</sup> R. H. Thouless, *Social Psychology*, p. 97.

slowly. Then Dr. Nansen began to tour England with a magic lantern. He showed on a screen pictures of the corpses of the starved piled almost as high as the hills. Immediately the money began to pour in.

The power of drawing vivid word-pictures, therefore, is immensely valuable. Some persons are born word-painters, and these have great power of speech ; but all speakers can cultivate this art and greatly improve their facility in it by taking the necessary trouble. Moreover, this concrete mode of expression of which we are speaking is greatly assisted by the use of *short* words and short sentences. These arrest the imagination and compel attention, whereas complicated words and long, involved sentences produce a blurred and indistinct effect.

A third requirement in a sermon is that it should be *dogmatic*. It is a complete fallacy to suppose, as many do, that the public does not want dogmas. Human nature loves dogmas, for a dogma is only a clear and settled form of belief. In witness of this we may notice the power of the Roman church. We need not be Roman Catholics to realise that the gospel is dogmatic. It is good news,—a definite message. It is not a hypothesis. A hypothesis is not sufficient. Every idea which ‘ catches on ’ is a dogma. Even Modernism must be dogmatic if it is to prevail. The modern churchman (if he is really ‘ modern ’) is just as dogmatic as the mediæval. The only difference between the two is that their dogmas are not the same. Indeed, it is of the essence of heretics to be dogmatic.<sup>1</sup> It is because they thus appeal to the imagination that they so frequently capture the popular mind.

Imagination, however, is not the only capacity in man. There is also the reason. To influence imagina-

<sup>1</sup> See p. 22.

tion, therefore, against the dictates of reason is dishonest, if *done deliberately*, and in any case harmful. Though the preacher must be dogmatic, let him beware what dogmas he proclaims. There are several safeguards which he does well to observe. In the first place, let him adhere to a certain largeness of topic. Let him never be trivial in his choice of subjects, but rather dwell continually upon the fundamental truths. For example, a course of sermons on such minor points as vestments or incense would hardly be appropriate.

In the second place, let him remember that wise dogmatism consists in the enunciation of positive truth rather than in the negation of error ; otherwise the imagination may be caught rather by the error than by the truth. There is a real danger in putting up men of straw and then attempting to knock them down. As Fénelon remarked, " It is much more easy to depict the disorders of the world than to explain with precision the depths of Christian doctrine." <sup>1</sup> Some preachers go grievously astray here and succeed in making the doctrines which they are endeavouring to suppress more forcible and attractive than those which they recommend. It is said that on one occasion at the close of an eloquent sermon which was preached on the Resurrection the remark was made, " I had no idea how many objections there were to the Resurrection."

Closely allied to this requirement is a third, namely, that the preacher should observe the proportion of faith. The regular order and system of the Church's year tends to ensure this. So also do carefully thought out courses, with appropriate titles. Regard to this consideration will preserve the preacher from the danger of being the victim of a

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Dupanloup, *op. cit.* p. 179.

craze, or a pet idea. This is frequently due to a defective imagination which is able to grasp only one idea at a time.

Lastly, under the substance of the sermon, we notice the finish. This, as is well known, is of critical importance. Other things being equal, the closing words of a sermon linger longest in the imagination. The conclusion should always have an imaginative appeal. A weak ending will do much to discount the value of a sermon.

(c) We now come to consider the preparation. In a true sense the whole of the preacher's previous life is his preparation for the sermon. This must never be forgotten. His imagination must be captured by the vision of this supremely important truth, for if he beholds it, he will be led to take unceasing pains to make himself as efficient as his talents permit. We are, however, concerned here more particularly with the immediate preparation. We imagine the preacher sitting down (or better still, kneeling down) with his great objective before him,—to teach and to comfort. How is he to achieve it? First of all, he should, as Bishop Dupanloup reminds us, imaginatively represent the congregation to whom he is going to speak. "I am never tired of repeating," he says, "to put and keep one's self always in the presence of one's hearers when one composes or prepares to speak; nothing inspires or excites the orator more."<sup>1</sup>

The next requirement is, as we have seen, that the sermon should consist of one main idea. The art of preaching is largely to secure such an idea. The preacher will naturally pray and expect an answer. If nothing comes, let him read some suggestive book. He should keep such continually by his side. He can hardly expect to have inspirations, however, if he does not keep them when they do come.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 30.

Consequently he should jot down ideas as they strike him, and for this purpose he should carry about a little book with him in his pocket. Many preachers have probably never preached their best sermons because they have allowed them to slip. An idea that strikes the imagination in this way will always make a forcible sermon. The fact that it has caught the imagination of the preacher is sufficient guarantee that it will catch the imagination of his hearers.

In the book in which the preacher writes down ideas that strike him he should also keep illustrations. Writing them down, moreover, will impress them on his memory. Such illustrations he will find not only in his reading but also in his daily experience, and he should cultivate the art of looking for them. It is said that soldiers get into the habit of viewing the countryside from the point of view of military tactics. In like manner, the priest should cultivate the habit of finding illustrations for sermons in every-day life. It is surprising how a little practice will produce considerable facility in this art. Some minds are, of course, much quicker than others to see analogies, but it is a power which is capable of being cultivated by all.

Having secured his main idea, the preacher should then decide upon the form, or shape, of the sermon. The best way of doing this is to set out upon paper the points in order, leaving blank spaces for their development. Above all, he will take great care about the conclusion. This is the weakest part of a great many sermons, which are reminiscent of a dog going round and round as it prepares to sit down ; so are some speakers. To change the figure, a sermon without a good finish is a gateway leading to nowhere.

A scheme drawn up in this way can be gradually filled in. At first it may be found difficult to follow this method, but practice makes it easier, and it is the only way

to *ensure* symmetry in a sermon in all cases. The filling in of the form may be done either in detail (that is, by writing out in full), or by developing main headings. In either case the choice of language is very important, if the aim is to make an appeal to the imagination. As we have already said, short, vivid, Anglo-Saxon words, and short sentences, should be plentiful. Form on a large scale, as it were, may be achieved by means of a course of sermons. The value of a course is considerable, provided that it be not too long. In that case the imagination tends to become wearied before the end.

Finally, a word may be said about the vexed question of the preaching of old sermons. The essential requirement, we have seen, is that the imagination of the preacher should be dominated by his subject. If an old sermon is pulled out of a drawer half-an-hour before delivery, this cannot be. On the other hand, because a sermon has been preached once, there seems to be no sufficient reason for thinking that this disqualifies it for being of any further use. Some men go so far as to say they cannot really preach a sermon until it has been used two or three times. Doubtless this is an exaggeration. Yet, beyond question, a sermon which has been preached before often gains a great deal from the first preaching, and so long as the imagination of the preacher is fired by his subject, there is no real objection to preaching the same sermon more than once ; for in that case indeed it never can be the same sermon. The material may be largely the same, but the actual contact between preacher and congregation will on each occasion strike fire afresh and fuse it into something new.

*PART IV*  
HISTORICAL



## CHAPTER VIII

### SOME ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE PRACTICAL IMPORTANCE OF IMAGINATION IN RELIGION

WE have now to consider some historical illustrations of the foregoing principles. We shall purposely select instances as widely differing as possible, with a view to showing the central part played by imagination in all forms of Christianity. Few things are more striking in the history of great religious movements than the immense influence of imagination. It is, I believe, true to say that the secret of success in every religious advance or revival is the capturing of the imagination.

We begin by considering the great religious movement initiated by Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits. Ignatius himself was a man with a tremendously vivid imagination. He was also a visionary, but he believed himself to be able to distinguish quite definitely between the creations of his own fancy and his visions. In his great book, *The Spiritual Exercises*, however, he succeeds in a truly marvellous way in concealing his personality, so that in one sense it is of small importance what sort of a man he himself was. The Jesuit movement, once started on its way, has owed its guidance and nourishment ever since to this wonderful book, rather than to the man who wrote it. Yet such a book could never have been written by anybody who was not highly imaginative and gifted with a capacity of experiencing all kinds of imagery, and particularly visual imagery. It is indeed one long, sustained appeal to imagination, quite as much as, though in a very different way from, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. These spiritual exercises

are essentially imaginative exercises. It would, indeed, not be inaccurate to call the book, Spiritual Exercises for the Imagination.

The distinctive quality of the appeal made by the book, however, is that it is fundamentally an appeal to the chivalrous imagination, and it is this which constitutes its chief glory. We shall see later on how frequently imagination is liable to be stimulated through self-interest. This is not surprising, since the ego is the most fertile source of imaginative fancy ; nor is this appeal absent from *The Spiritual Exercises*. Yet it is not the author's intention to make it the main appeal, which is objective rather than subjective. Where the stimulus to self-interested imagination occurs, it arises from the motive of fear, which Ignatius stirs by most vivid representations of hell and of death. In these days when few believe in a hell of literal flames, this part of the appeal will have smaller effect than it had in the time of Ignatius. But since this appeal is in any case subordinate, the book as a whole has by no means lost its power in consequence of the changed outlook.

*The Spiritual Exercises* is divided up into four periods of a week each. These divisions are not necessarily to be considered as periods of seven days but as four spiritual stages, although normally the performance of the exercises takes thirty days. In each of these periods powerful appeal is made to the imagination. It is impossible to convey at all fully to anybody not acquainted with the book the force of this appeal, since a mere description of it would be altogether inadequate. The only plan for us to adopt here, therefore, is to illustrate our account by a number of extracts. It is hoped that these will give at any rate some idea of the force of the whole.

The first ' week ' of the exercises is devoted to the attempt

to bring home to the soul the horror of sin. Each Meditation begins with what Ignatius calls two 'preambles,' the first of which he styles 'Seeing the place.' This is a frank appeal to visual imagination. In the Considerations which follow, the imagination is also constantly stirred. Take, for instance, the following 'consideration' on the likeness of the sinner to a corpse: "And what difference is there between a corpse and a soul in mortal sin? A corpse has lost the use of all its senses. Is not this a faithful image of the sinner?"

1. *A dead man no longer sees.* Everything ought to strike the eyes of the sinner;—the state of his soul, the grave ready to open for him—judgment, hell, eternity; and the sinner sees nothing!

2. *The dead no longer hear.* Everything speaks to the sinner;—conscience, grace, events, ministers of religion; and the sinner hears nothing!

3. *The dead are insensible.* Neither insults nor honours, neither the attentions of men nor their contempt, can touch them. God moves heaven and earth to touch the sinner; He endeavours to rouse him, sometimes by benefits, sometimes by afflictions; and the sinner remains insensible!

4. *The dead exhale an infectious odour.* A corpse, if not placed in the grave, spreads around it a fatal contagion. The sinner exhales an odour of corruption; the contagion of his scandals spreads death around him, and the infection of his vices makes him an object of horror to just men, to angels, and to God."

Again, take the following from the first Meditation on hell:

"Represent to yourself an assembly so hideous, that even in the galleys and prisons of human justice you could not find anything like it; an assembly of all that the earth has borne of licentious men, of robbers, of assassins, of

parricides. Imagine to yourself all these wretches bound together, according to the expression of the Holy Spirit, like a bundle of thorns—‘ As a bundle of thorns they shall be burnt with fire ’ (Isaias xxxiii. 12) ; or a heap of tow cast into the midst of the flames—‘ The congregation of sinners is like tow heaped together, and the end of them is a flame of fire ’ (Ecclus. xxi. 10). Represent to yourself in this horrible reunion the accomplices or the victims of the damned bound and chained with him to burn in the same fire ; ‘ They themselves being fettered with the bonds of darkness, and a long night ’ (Wis. xvii. 2).”

Immediately after this the exercitant is bidden to consider the ‘ torment of the imagination ’ of the damned : “ *Torment of the imagination.* The imagination of the damned presents his misery to him with incredible clearness. It represents to him all the pleasures of his past life. See how happy thou wert on earth ; thy life was but one tissue of delight and joy ; all that is passed and can never return : ‘ All those things have passed away ’ (Wis. v. 9). It shows him all he has suffered, all that he has yet to suffer. Oh, what years thou has burnt in hell, and yet thy eternity is not begun ! Oh, what ages and millions of ages will pass, and thou wilt have no other occupation but to burn ! It shows him heaven, with all its felicity. How happy thou wouldst be near Mary, near Jesus Christ. Listen to the songs of the blessed ; behold those souls which love and possess God for all eternity. All that is lost for thee. ‘ The wicked shall see, and shall be angry, he shall gnash with his teeth and pine away ; the desire of the wicked shall perish ’ (Psalm cxi. 10).”

Shortly afterwards there follows a systematic appeal to imagination in all the five senses, an Exercise which Ignatius calls the “ Application of the Senses.”

“ 1. *Application of the sight.* Consider in your mind the vast fire of hell ; souls shut up in bodies of fire, as in an eternal prison ; wicked spirits constantly employed in tormenting them.

2. *Application of the hearing.* Listen to the groans, the howls, the cries of rage, the blasphemies against Christ and His saints, the mutual maledictions of the damned.

3. *Application of the smell.* Imagine you smell the fire, the brimstone, the infection which exhales from so many hideous corpses.

4. *Application of the taste.* Taste in spirit all the bitterness, the tears, the regrets, the remorse of the damned.

5. *Application of the touch.* Touch in imagination those devouring flames which in hell consume not only the bodies of the reprobate, but the souls themselves. What do you think of them ? Could you inhabit these eternal furnaces for a few hours ? ‘ Which of you shall dwell with everlasting burning ? ’ (Isaiah, xxxiii. 14). ”

Equally powerful is the appeal to the imagination in connexion with death. Here is St. Ignatius’ “ Third Exercise on Death ” :

“ *Application of the sight.* Consider—1. A few moments after your death. Your body laid on a funeral bed, wrapped in a shroud, a veil thrown over your face ; beside you the crucifix, the holy water, friends, relatives, a priest kneeling by your sad remains, and reciting the holy prayers, “ De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine ” ; the public officer who writes in the register of the dead all the particulars of your decease—such a death, such a year, such a day, such an hour—the servants all occupied with the preparation for your funeral.

2. The day after your death. Your inanimate body enclosed in a coffin, covered with a pall, taken from your

apartment, sadly carried to the foot of the altar, received by the priest of Jesus Christ ; deposited before the Lord present in the Tabernacle ; then, the Holy Sacrifice over, laid in its last home, the grave. Consider well the dismal field where the eye sees nothing but tombs ; this open grave where they are laying your body, the priest who blesses you for the last time, your relatives and friends who contemplate the spectacle with fear, the grave-digger who ends the scene by throwing earth on your coffin.

3. Some months after your death. Contemplate this stone already blackened by time, this inscription beginning to be effaced ; and under that stone, in that coffin which is crumbling bit by bit, contemplate the sad state of your body ; see how the worms devour the remains of putrid flesh ; how all the limbs are separating ; how the bones are eaten away by the corruption of the tomb ! See what remains of the body you have loved so much !—a something which has no name in any tongue, and on which we cannot think without disgust.

Application of the *hearing*. Go through again the different scenes where you are the spectacle. Listen—(1) to the dismal sound of the bells which announce your death and which beg the prayers of the faithful for your soul. (2) The prayers which they recite at the foot of your bed : “ Saints of God, come to its assistance. Angels of God, come to its help ; receive his soul. Eternal rest give unto him, O Lord ; and let perpetual light shine upon him.” (3) The remarks of the servants who speak of you. (4) Your friends and relatives, who communicate to each other their reflections on your death, and mutually console each other for your loss. (5) The assistants called in to arrange your funeral, who speak of you with cold indifference. (6) The chants of the Church during the funeral

service ; ‘ Deliver me, Lord from eternal death in that dreadful day when the heavens and the earth shall tremble, when Thou shalt come to judge the world by fire :—that day, a day of wrath, of calamity, and of misery ; that great and very bitter day.’ (7) The conversations of the persons whom duty, friendship or civility call to your funeral. (8) What is said of you in society after your death. Examine well all these circumstances, and conclude by making a resolution to detach yourself from creatures, and belong to God alone.

Application of the *smell* and the *touch*. Imagine yourself respiring the odour your body exhales when the soul is departed ; the infection it would give out, if it were taken from the coffin a few months after your death. Imagine you touch this damp earth, where they have laid you ; this shroud in which they have wrapped you, and which is now in rags ; this bare skull, once the seat of thought ; these dismembered limbs, which once obeyed all the orders of your will ;—in fine, this mass of corruption, which the sepulchre has enclosed a few months, and the sight of which is horrible. In presence of this terrible scene, ask yourself what are health, fortune, friendship of the world, pleasures of the senses, life itself : ‘ Vanity of vanities, all is vanity ’ (Eccles. i. 2).”

In the second week, the exercitant is led up to the final appeal to complete surrender to Christ. Here the imagination is directed to the incarnate life of our Lord, and there is introduced here and in the third week on two occasions the procedure of the application of the senses. Here is the Exercise in connexion with the Christmas story :

“ 1. *Sight*. Contemplate the stable which is falling in ruins ; the manger where Jesus Christ reposes on a little straw ; the coarse swaddling clothes in which He is

wrapped ; the animals which warm Him with their breath ; the Divine Infant Himself, who fixes His eyes on us, and extends His arms to us ; Mary and Joseph praying before the manger ; the shepherds coming to adore the new-born Child whom the angel has announced to them ; all heaven attentive to the great event which is being accomplished at Bethlehem ; and, at the same time, the profound indifference of the rest of men to the coming of the Son of God. Practical reflections and affections.

2. *Hearing.* Listen to the discourse of the strangers going to Bethlehem ; to the conversations of Mary and Joseph during the journey ; to the words of the inhabitants of Bethlehem, who repulse them ; to Jesus Christ, who speaks to His heavenly Father, who speaks to us by His cries and His tears ; to the angels singing in the heavens, ‘ Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace ’ ; to the shepherds making inquiries from the holy family about the birth of Jesus. Practical reflections and affections.

3. *Taste.* Taste interiorly the bitterness of the hearts of Mary and Joseph ; the peace of their souls ; their joy at the sight of the new-born God. Unite yourself in spirit to the abasement, the tears, the poverty, the prayer, all the virtues of our Saviour in His birth. Practical reflections and affections.

4. *Touch.* Kiss respectfully the walls of the stable, the straw in the manger, the swaddling clothes, the sacred hands and feet of Jesus Christ. Practical reflections and affections.”

Thus the way is led to the climax of the Exercises which occurs at the end of the second ‘ week.’ The exercitant must decide whether or not he should become a monk. Moreover, he must decide for himself. The Director of the Exercises is strictly forbidden to talk to him about it. We may surmise that the reason for this is that the influence

which the previous meditations have had upon him might possibly be weakened by conversation in the light of common day. The great decision is brought before the taker of the Exercises by the imaginative appeal of the 'two standards',—the standard of Lucifer, the prince of darkness, and the standard of Christ. This meditation is to be made at midnight, on rising, about the time of Mass, and at vespers.

The second two weeks afford a comparative relaxation after the very great strain of the first two. In the third week, meditation is made on the Eucharist and on the Passion of our Lord. And here the exercitant in each case, in addition to the application of the senses, must bring home the meditation to his imagination by thinking of himself as present at each mystery of the Passion, and realizing, in St. Paul's words, that "He loved me and gave Himself for me."

In the last week the soul occupies itself entirely with the love of God and a desire for eternity. The themes chosen are the Resurrection and Heaven. We may take as a brief example of this the following Meditation entitled 'The Beatitude of the Senses':

"1. *Beatitude of the senses.* The body raised up at the last day and united to the soul, whose servant it was, will partake of its felicity. The ear will not weary of hearing the sacred songs of the elect; the eye will never tire in contemplating the light of Paradise, the splendour of the glorified saints, the sweet majesty of Mary on her throne, the lustre of the adorable humanity of Jesus Christ;—all the senses will be inebriated with these pure and spiritual pleasures, which appear to belong only to the celestial intelligences: 'They shall be inebriated with the plenty of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of Thy pleasure' (Psalm xxxv. 9)."

In order to appreciate the powerful appeal of these Exercises, it is necessary to bear in mind the conditions under which they are usually carried out. The Jesuit novice is led to believe that they will constitute for him the supreme spiritual experience of his life hitherto. *The Spiritual Exercises* is, of course, a closed book for him before the time comes. Consequently he begins the Long Retreat, as the period of the Exercises is called, with a highly stirred imagination, and the actual time of the Exercises is planned to the last detail with a view to giving them their maximum effect. Accordingly the early period is one of fasting, and spiritual strain. Everything is suggestive of the horror and darkness of sin. Even the blind must not be drawn to admit the light. Under such circumstances, therefore, the effect of these Exercises looked at simply from the psychological point of view will be immensely increased. It is, therefore, no exaggeration to say that the force and power of Ignatius' influence and of the whole Jesuit movement is ultimately derived from an appeal to imagination.

This claim is confirmed by Ignatius' attitude to matters of doctrine. He never once argues or disputes against heresy, although he is almost fierce in his orthodoxy. Rather he appeals to the imagination by urging complete and implicit obedience to Holy Church. This is how he words his appeal : " To be with the Church of Jesus Christ of one mind and one spirit, we must carry our confidence in her, and our distrust of ourselves, so far as to admit, if she reveals to us that something which seems white to us is black, that it is black." The modern English Translation has reduced the highly imaginative tone of this appeal by rendering the last part of the sentence as " so far as to pronounce that true which appears to us false, if she decides that it is so." This rendering is doubtless less offensive to

logical thought, but Ignatius' way of putting it appeals more forcibly to the imagination, and undoubtedly represents more accurately the whole tenor of the Exercises.

We now pass to consider a movement which stands at the opposite pole of Christian experience, namely, Quakerism. George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, was evidently a man with a very vivid imagination. He both heard voices and saw visions. As is well known, he constantly heard the Lord telling him what to do, and teaching him the meaning of life. Thus, for example, he described what we may call his conversion :

“ And when all my hopes in them [clergy and ministers] and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, oh ! then, I heard a voice which said, ‘ There is One, even Christ Jesus, which can speak to thy condition.’ When I heard it my heart did leap for joy. Then the Lord let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give him all the glory. For all are concluded under sin and shut up in unbelief as I had been that Jesus Christ might have pre-eminence, who enlightens, and gives grace, faith and power. Thus when God doth work, who shall let it ? This I knew experimentally.”<sup>1</sup>

This is closely parallel to the saying of St. Teresa, “ When our Lord speaks, it is at once word and work.”<sup>2</sup>

Fox also saw visions. The most striking instance of this is to be found in the celebrated account which he has given of his visit to Lichfield ; how he took off his shoes by the command of the Lord, and went up and down the streets and the market place on market day, crying with a loud voice, “ Woe to the bloody city of Lichfield.”

<sup>1</sup> *George Fox's Journal*, 5th Philadelphia Edition, vol. I. p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> *Autobiography of St. Teresa*, ch. 25, sec. 5.

“As I went thus crying through the streets,” he says, “there seemed to me to be a channel of blood running down the streets and the market place appeared like a pool of blood.”<sup>1</sup>

Here is another instance :

“In the year 1648, as I was sitting in a friend’s house in Nottinghamshire (for by this time the power of God had opened the hearts of some to receive the word of life and reconciliation), I saw there a great crack to go through-out the earth, and a great smoke to go as the crack went, and that after the crack there should be a great shaking. This was the earth in people’s hearts, which was to be shaken before the seed of God was raised out of the earth. And it was so, for the Lord’s power began to shake them, and great meetings we began to have.”<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after this he saw a vision of the blood of Christ. He writes as follows :

“Soon after there was another great meeting of professors [*i.e.* professing Christians], and a captain named Amos Stoddard came in. They were discoursing of the blood of Christ. As they were discoursing of it, I saw, through the immediate opening of the invisible Spirit, the blood of Christ ; and cried out among them, saying, ‘Do ye not see the blood of Christ ? See it in your hearts, to sprinkle your hearts and consciences from dead works, to serve the living God.’”<sup>3</sup>

The man who had such experiences as these was evidently of a highly imaginative type. It was owing to the vividness of his imagination that he was pre-eminently a man of action.

Fox’s message, however, at first sight appears to be anything but an appeal to imagination for, as is well known, he utterly repudiated all outward forms and ceremonies,

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 101.

which have so great an influence upon it. Nevertheless the imaginative appeal is central in Quakerism. It consists in the sheer simplicity of the message, and, above all, in that it is addressed to that most fertile source of imagination, the ego. The gospel as preached by Fox is addressed not to the crowd, but to each individual, and it may be summed up in a single sentence : " You have each within you the light of the world ; there is no need for you to have recourse to others ; *you* have only to look within." That is a wonderful picture. It is not surprising that it caught men's imagination. It strikes home, whether to the lettered or to the ignorant.

Furthermore, in his doctrine of quiet waiting upon God, Fox had intuitively hit upon the way to avoid the ill effects of the Law of Reversed Effort. In other words, he had learnt how to control the imagination. " A man ", he writes, " may be brought to see his evil thoughts, running mind, and vain imaginations, and may strive to keep them down, and to keep his mind in ; but he cannot overcome them, nor keep his mind within to the Lord. In this state and condition submit to the Spirit of the Lord that shows them, and that will bring to wait upon the Lord ; and he that hath discovered them will destroy them. Therefore stand in the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ (Who is the Author of the true faith) and mind Him." <sup>1</sup> As he expresses it on another occasion, this is " *to stand still in the light.*" Here is a wonderful description of that state of effortless concentration, which psychology has shown to be essential for the fixing of the imagination upon God, Who is the true light. This is the secret of the power of the Quaker meeting. At first sight, it is utterly incredible that such an intolerably dull proceeding as a Quaker meeting

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 131.

seems to the outside observer to be, should ever have 'caught on.' The explanation is to be bound in the fact that it provides the circumstances whereby the imagination is fixed on God. Those present do not kneel ; they adopt the restful posture of sitting,—one which is recommended by many psychologists for the practice of effortless concentration. Moreover, they sit round in a circle, thus mutually suggesting to each other the common purpose of the meeting. By this means, each individual is aided in the realisation of this purpose by observing those around him. As they sit thus quietly and without effort, divine pictures enter their minds, pictures which they are free to paint—to word-paint—for others. Thus the imagination of each speaker is strengthened and that of the listeners is stirred. It is no accident that the Quaker thinks of God especially in terms of light, for light it is which best holds the attention without effort, as every hypnotist knows when he is trying to control the roving imagination of his patients. He brings their minds to rest by holding before their eyes a light, or some bright and shining object.

The nature of these pictures which the Quaker is thus to hold before his mind is summed up in Fox's doctrine of perfection. The true believer, he teaches, does not sin. He is able by faith to realise the command to 'be perfect.' Once more let us quote Fox's own words :

"While I was here in prison divers professors came to discourse with me. I had a sense before they spoke that they came to plead for sin and imperfection. I asked them whether they were believers and had faith ? They said, Yes. I asked them, In whom ? They said, In Christ. I replied, If ye are true believers in Christ, you are passed from death to life ; and if passed from death, then from sin that bringeth death : and if your faith be true, it will give

you victory over sin and the devil. Purify your hearts and conscience and bring you to please God, and give you access to Him again. But they could not endure to hear of purity, and of victory over sin and the devil. They said, 'They could not believe any could be free from sin on this side the grave.' I bid them give over babbling about the Scriptures, which were holy men's words, whilst they pleaded for unholiness."<sup>1</sup>

Fox's position is indeed questionable theology, but it is faultless psychology. If the idea of perfection captures the imagination, it will necessarily expel many evil thoughts. Once more we see how forcible is the appeal of Quakerism to the imagination.

Furthermore, the imaginative appeal of Quakerism was enormously aided in Fox's lifetime by the impression made by the man himself. It is hardly surprising if the heroic figure of this man, who endured so many trials with such endurance and fortitude, should have powerfully impressed itself upon the minds of multitudes. Fox himself, by virtue of his personality, was indeed a standing contradiction to the whole of his unsacramental teaching. His body was in fact an outward and visible sign of the inward spiritual grace. "The most awful, living, reverent frame I ever felt or beheld," said William Penn, "was his in prayer."<sup>2</sup>

The history of Quakerism illustrates in another way the great practical significance of imagination in religion. It is well known that Fox suffered numerous imprisonments and much opposition, but it is safe to say that nothing enraged men against him more than the apparently trivial fact that he and his followers insisted on saying 'thou' and 'thee' instead of 'you', and refused to doff their hats to any, on the

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* pp. 128-9.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by T. Hodgkin, *George Fox*, p. 275.

plea that there should be with men, as with God, no respect of persons.

“ Oh ! the rage there was in the priests, magistrates, professors, and people of all sorts ; but especially in priests and professors : for though ‘ thou ’ to a single person was according to their accident and grammar rules, and according to the Bible, yet they could not bear to hear it ; and because I could not put off my hat to them, it set them all in a rage. . . . Oh ! the scorn, heat and fury that arose ! Oh ! the blows, punchings, beatings, and imprisonments that we underwent for not putting off our hats to men ! . . . The bad language and evil usage we received on this account is hard to be expressed, besides the danger we were sometimes in of losing our lives for this matter.”<sup>1</sup>

Could a clearer instance be found to prove the importance of the appeal to the imagination ? Fox failed to realise that the sacramental principle can by no means be evaded. By deliberately attempting to avoid it, one necessarily evokes it.

The same appeal to imagination is, beyond question, the secret of the power of the great Evangelical Revival. Everybody knows that the heart of the Evangelical message was faith. ‘ Believe only,’ was John Wesley’s invariable reply to the anxious questioner. And Wesley realised (whether consciously or unconsciously) that faith centres in the imagination. If we pass in review his methods, this point becomes luminously clear. In the first place, we notice his method of preaching. He lacked Whitfield’s power of appealing to the imagination by virtue of the gift of sheer oratory ; but he achieved the same objective by the intensely *personal* quality of his preaching. The words ‘ thou ’ and ‘ thee ’ are scattered thickly over the face of Wesley’s sermons. He thus appealed to the imagination of

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 113.

his hearers by stirring their self-regarding sentiment, which, as we have said, is the producer of the most vivid mental imagery. Moreover, having by this means aroused fearful imaginations of everlasting death and torment, he then suddenly turned upon the minds of his hearers a veritable blaze of hope and, indeed, of certainty of future salvation.

Furthermore, Wesley's organising of Band Meetings powerfully stirred the imagination. These groups were bidden to meet together and to observe the Apostolic injunction, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another that ye may be healed." The effect of these meetings was, needless to say, a powerful appeal to the imagination. Few things are better calculated to impress the imagination than meetings of this description, when men and women are able to *see* the salvation of God in the lives of their neighbours.

Once more, the annual renewal of the baptismal promise at the Covenant Service was often impressive, especially when large crowds stood up to renew their vows. The same is true of the Watchnight Service, which Wesley inaugurated. It is evident that in all these ways Wesley was seeking to stir men's imagination and thus to lead them to faith. He made no appeal whatever to logical reason. Indeed, he seems to have devoted little attention to theological matters after his Oxford days, whereas Whitfield, of course, had hardly even a smattering of theological learning.

The most impressive evidence of all, however, which goes to prove that the Evangelical Revival was mainly an appeal to the imagination is provided by the physical phenomena which so frequently accompanied the preaching of the Methodists. Men and women, and even children, fell upon the floor with groans and shouts and screams. They even swooned. The significance of this will be clear

from what has already been said. The imagination is closely associated with the motor centres of the body and leads to action, more particularly when the critical reason is in abeyance.<sup>1</sup> Consequently we can infer with certainty from these phenomena how directly and powerfully the preaching of the Methodists struck upon the popular imagination. Wesley and Whitfield, especially the latter, had veritably hypnotic powers. Like other great men in history, they possessed the power of dominating their fellows. This they did by capturing their imaginations and ruling them, even as the hypnotist controls the imagination of his patient. In such cases the appropriate actions inevitably follow.

An even more striking instance of the power of imagination in Christian history is, perhaps, provided by the development and growth of the Oxford Movement. It would be difficult to find an instance of a religious movement whose leaders were less enslaved by the imagination than the founders of the Tractarian Revival. John Keble, Hugh James Rose, William Palmer, Richard Hurrell Froude, John Henry Newman, Richard Church, were all scholars with highly cultivated minds. They would be, accordingly, as little subject to the influence of the vagaries of the imagination as it is possible to be. Moreover, in the methods they adopted they made no stirring popular appeal. Emotionalism was utterly foreign to their whole design. Unconsciously, no doubt, they did catch the public imagination. The very title of Keble's Assize Sermon, *National Apostasy*, contains a strong imaginative appeal. Nevertheless it is true to say that they shunned rather than sought any deliberate imaginative appeal. The Movement came to be known as 'ritualist' but the early Tractarians were not interested in ceremonial. Newman celebrated the

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix.

Holy Communion at the north end of the altar to the end of his Anglican days. The black gown was regularly used by the Tractarians in preaching.

The significant point for us to observe, however, in the present connexion is this. In course of time, human nature being what it is, the Movement did become interested in ceremonial, and when the ceremonial revival began (and not until then), there began also the rapid growth of the Movement and at the same time the most bitter opposition to it. It is safe to say that, apart from the ceremonial revival, the Movement would not have made one tithe of the progress which has in fact taken place. It would be hard to point to a more impressive instance to prove the vital practical importance of the imaginative appeal. We may illustrate this point by putting together two proverbs. On the one hand, 'seeing is believing.' That is why the Oxford Movement necessarily developed a ceremonial revival. On the other hand, "What the eye does not see, the heart does not grieve over." That is why rioting did not begin until ceremonial reforms were initiated. It was once more the case of the red rag and the bull. Many a parish priest is well aware of the significance of this from his own experience.

We may conclude this historical survey by turning our attention to two contemporary religious movements which occupy the public attention a good deal, Christian Science and Buchmannism. Christian Science illustrates the main thesis of this book more powerfully than any other system of thought that has ever existed, for its underlying creed is essentially this : Imagination is the only reality. It follows, therefore, that if this creed is really believed, imagination will operate with its maximum power. This is what has happened in the case of Christian Science. The text-book

of the Christian Scientists, *Science and Health*, has gone through an incredibly large number of editions. This fact alone is sufficient to prove how vast has been its influence, and how vital a place is occupied in life by imagination. The fallacies in the book have been exposed over and over again, but this makes little difference to the progress of the movement, which still continues to grow steadily, because it lives not by logic but by imagination.

We must now observe exactly how imagination is called into play in Christian Science. Mrs. Eddy tells us quite frankly how she was led to make her discovery, which was destined to have so powerful an effect upon the world. She once administered to a patient "sinking in the last stage of typhoid fever" a solution of common salt so weak that "there was not a single saline property left." But she administered a teaspoonful of this solution every three hours evidently in such an impressive manner that the patient rallied and recovered. This proved to her "that there is no efficacy in the drug" and that it is the mind (that is, imagination) alone that heals. It is also the mind alone that makes people ill. This was proved to Mrs. Eddy's satisfaction by another case which she cites as follows: "A gentleman was made to believe that he occupied a bed where a cholera patient had died. Immediately the symptoms of this disease appeared in him, and he died. The fact was, that he had not caught the cholera by material contact, because no such patient had been in that bed."<sup>1</sup>

From such instances as these, Mrs. Eddy was led to formulate the belief that all sick imaginations produce sick bodies, and this is, beyond question, a fact. The cardinal error of Christian Science is, as we have already suggested (see page 12) that it attempts to convert this proposition

<sup>1</sup> *Science and Health*, p. 47 (201st edition).

and to argue that therefore it follows that all sick bodies are produced by sick imaginations. That is illogical. All cows are four-legged, but obviously it is not true that all four-legged things are cows.

Mrs. Eddy, however, is not concerned with logic. She is concerned to capture the imagination of the public, and it must be confessed that she has succeeded to a remarkable degree. Her theory is delightfully simple. It is that all disease is due to a sick imagination, because imagination is the only reality. The material world is sheer illusion. This thesis is reiterated with almost inconceivable ingenuity and, if the truth be spoken, monotony in *Science and Health*. But the author divined (at least unconsciously) that this is the way to impress the popular imagination. How far she has succeeded is well illustrated by the fact that the public has swallowed such passages as those in which she deals with the awkward problems raised by the necessity of food and of surgery, both of which obviously, on Christian Science principles, are illusory. With regard to the former, she writes :

“The fact is, food does not affect the real existence of man . . . but it would be foolish to venture beyond our present understanding, foolish to stop eating until we gain more goodness, and a clearer comprehension of the living God.”<sup>1</sup> Again, with reference to surgery, “Until the advancing age admits the efficacy and supremacy of Mind, it is better to leave the adjustment of broken bones and dislocations to the fingers of a surgeon, while you confine yourself chiefly to mental reconstruction and the prevention of inflammation or protracted confinement.”<sup>2</sup>

The practice of Christian Science is a skilful attempt to control men's imagination by excluding all pictures of

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*: p. 387.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 400.

disease, and filling the mind with pictures of health. Each individual must, as Mrs. Eddy puts it, "stand porter at the door of thought . . . . When the condition is present which you say induces disease, whether it be act, exercise, heredity, contagion, or accident, then perform your office as porter, shutting out these unhealthy thoughts and fears." <sup>1</sup> Mrs. Eddy also realised the power of words to capture men's imagination, and therefore she very wisely advised her healers not even to mention by name the disease they are treating. Coué was emphasising exactly the same point when he insisted that the formula used in auto-suggestion, or in hetero-suggestion, should not mention directly the evil to be banished from the imagination, otherwise it may have an effect precisely opposite to that intended.

✓ The whole secret of Christian Science is to be found in the power of imagination. On every page of *Science and Health* this truth (for it is, as we have seen, a great truth), is to be found, albeit frequently embedded in the strangest of strange surroundings. In order to test this thesis, I opened the book three times haphazard, and this is what I found :

"The physical effects of fear illustrate its illusion. Gazing at a chained lion, crouched for a spring, would not scare a man. The body is affected only by the belief of disease, held before a mind ignorant of metaphysics, which chains disease." <sup>2</sup>

"Man is the offspring of spirit. The beautiful, good, and pure constitute his ancestry. His origin is not, like that of mortals, in brute instinct, nor does he pass through material conditions prior to reaching intelligence." <sup>3</sup>

"Human belief is an autocrat, though not deserving its power. It says to mortals, 'You are wretched !' and they become so. Human belief says, 'You are happy !' and

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 391.    <sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 379.    <sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 273.

mortals are so ; and no circumstance can alter the situation, until the belief on this subject changes. Human belief says to mortals, ' You are sick ! ' and this belief manifests itself as sickness." <sup>1</sup>

If I had opened the book at random thirty times instead of three, the result would have been much the same. *Science and Health* is one long insistence upon the theme that imagination is the only reality. If any reader doubts the trustworthiness of this experiment which I have recorded, he can easily settle the question by performing it for himself.

In conclusion, we may turn to consider briefly the religious movement founded by Frank Buchmann, sometimes misleadingly called the Oxford Group Movement. Once again we find that the appeal to imagination is central.

" ' What is the greatest mistake made by Evangelists ? ' I asked Sam.<sup>2</sup> The Rector of Calvary Church was very emphatic, ' The neglect to intrigue the man's imagination before moving in on his will.' Sam said the same thing again with more American snap. ' Lure is more effective than logic. I am never worried about a man who seems interested, who cannot leave us alone although he does not announce his decision. That is where some of the old timers fell down. They started to cudgel their wits and prove their theology before they had caught the interest by their own type of life or by stories of those who were living the life.' " <sup>3</sup>

In like manner, Frank Buchmann himself proclaims openly the doctrine of Coué, that when the imagination and the will are in conflict, the imagination invariably wins the

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.* the Rev. Sam. Shoemaker, Rector of Calvary Church, New York.

<sup>3</sup> A. J. Russell, *For Sinners Only*, p. 216.

day.<sup>1</sup> The four 'standards' of the Group, on which every member is to fix his imagination, are honesty, purity, love and unselfishness. All members of the movement are made to believe that it is possible for them to live at this level and all the methods adopted are calculated to impress the imagination to this end.

Consider, for instance, the effect of 'sharing' from this point of view. The appeal to imagination is very great when individuals stand up one after another and testify to the power of Christ in their lives. Especially is this the case when noted rakes and hardened evil-doers are to be found among the number. Whatever may be the effect upon the person who testifies, the power of these modern testimony meetings (for such they are) in capturing men's imagination is obviously very considerable.

Once more, the emphasis which the Group lays upon restitution frequently leads to forms of action which are highly spectacular. It is not simply that restitution must be made in the case of stolen goods. The Group also demands that when, for instance, a lie has been told, the liar should go and own up to the fact and should (if guided to do so) 'share' it with the other members of the Group, that is, confess it to them. Action of this kind makes a very strong appeal. The following is a typical case. It deals with the black sheep of the family.

"But what of the bad boy, the ugly duckling, with whom nobody can deal? Garrett Stearly told me that in South Africa the Group found such a boy; caned daily at school, moody and morose at home, his great claim to fame had been winning the junior swimming championship of his club. He was bribed by his godfather to attend a Group houseparty for the price of a cinema seat. At the party he

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 233.

was caught off his guard by the friendliness of the people he met, and soon found himself envying their state of abiding joy. He decided to try Christianity, though he saw it might be costly. First of all, there was that swimming championship—he had been six months over age when he won it, but no one knew. He took his courage and his beloved trophy cup in his hands and made a clean breast of it to the committee. The swimming coach was aghast. ‘You’ve more nerve than I have, my lad’, he could only grunt as the lad walked out, shorn of glory, but triumphant. Later, with the minister’s permission, he witnessed in his family church after service, and promised to restore several pounds that he had once stolen from the collection plate. A man in the congregation was so convicted that he sent back five pounds to a department store in the capital—value for goods quietly stolen some years before. The store sent the money on to the Oxford Group team, telling them to keep up the good work.”<sup>1</sup>

The danger of these practices of ‘sharing’ and restitution is very obvious. They may produce prigs and Pharisees rather than Christians, but as to the strength of their appeal to the imagination there can be no question. It is no exaggeration to say that this movement owes its rapid growth and development solely to these two powerful forms of appeal to the imagination. The other elements in the Group life, Quiet Time, Guidance and Team work are important for those who are already members, but they have no publicity value, as Americans would say. Frank Buchmann made the most strategic discovery of his life when he learned (to use his own words) “that the confessing Christian is a propagating Christian.” The public form of Buchmannite confession is, to put it rather bluntly, a form of advertisement, which has enabled the movement to capture people’s imagination.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* pp. 130-1.

That is how the movement began, Buchmann had organised his first religious house-party. It was at the summer resort of a famous Chinese diplomat. The nature of his original plan of action does not transpire, but during the course of the first two days it became clear to Buchmann that he must publicly confess that he had swindled a railway company some years before. He was convinced that it was not enough for him to do what at first he was prompted to do,—make restitution of the money anonymously. It was not even enough for him to write in his own name making restitution ; he must ' share ' with the house-party. He did so, and immediate results followed. One of those present was a man who had been dishonest in business. Forthwith Buchmann's example led him to make full restoration, although it left him with an empty bank. And so the Movement has gathered momentum. The imagination of many has been captured by the picture of people of all kinds, especially those in high position, publicly confessing and making restitution. Apart from this, the movement could not possibly have grown as it has done, and as it is continuing to do. But unless the very great danger of Pharisaism to which action of this kind exposes a person is obviated, the Group Movement carries within it the seeds of its own destruction. The appeal to the imagination cannot be made at any cost. The early Church discovered that public confession, despite its advantages, was not a good thing, and it substituted for it private confession. In these days those who have never experienced the power of the latter are in danger of forgetting that there is an alternative to public confession. Consequently they are in grievous danger of going astray.

Our brief historical survey, which has dealt with six different religious movements of the most varying and

widely differing types, might have been almost indefinitely enlarged. Perhaps it will have been sufficient, however, to demonstrate the main thesis of this book which is, that imagination, and in particular visual imagination, plays a determining part in the life, and especially the religious life, of man.



## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX

### WHY IMAGINATION LEADS TO ACTION

FOR the solution of this problem a brief excursus into the realms of physiology is necessary. The nervous system has apparently been built up in the course of evolution. It may be thought of as consisting of a series of grades or levels. The lowest level of all is the most primitive ; it is familiar to everybody in what is known as reflex action. A good instance of this is the knee reflex, which occurs when a person is tapped just below the knee-cap. At this level, stimulus is followed immediately by response without the intervention of consciousness at all, and sometimes even without its accompaniment. This is the most primitive form of nervous reaction.

In the course of evolution, however, this simple process has been rendered more complex by the development of the brain at one end of the spinal cord. By reason of the existence of the brain there have been formed, as it were, loops upon the simple reflex arcs. These extended arcs pass through the brain, and in such cases consciousness always supervenes, and it frequently modifies the immediacy of the response.

The brain, in fact, is like an enormously complicated telephone exchange, whereas the simple reflex arcs resemble the old-fashioned speaking tube, where only one line of communication and response was possible. Different areas of this exchange seem to have been allotted to different kinds of calls. Thus, sound stimuli are conveyed to the auditory

area of the brain, visual stimuli to the visual area, smells to the olfactory area, and so on. The most important and largest department in the brain, however, is known as the association area. Here the highly complex arrangements necessary for abstract, conceptual thinking are carried out. These are the latest areas to be developed in the course of evolution, whereas the simple reflex system was the first to be developed.<sup>1</sup>

Now it is a well established fact that those organisations in nature which are most primitive are most stable, just as in human relationships long-established businesses are likely to be. We can, therefore, easily trace these different grades in the nervous system by observing the effect of a narcotic drug upon them. We may take as an example alcohol. A man who is under the influence of alcoholic liquor first of all feels the effect of it in the association area of the brain because, as we have seen, this is the latest to be developed and therefore the least stable. Consequently the first signs of drunkenness reveal themselves in a weakening of the conscious power of judgment and thought. For example, the bridge player in this condition will trump his partner's ace unconcernedly. As intoxication increases, the more primitive levels which govern the movements of the body are affected. The man puts his glass on the table too forcibly ; he becomes unsteady in his gait, and so forth. Later the whole of the brain is affected, and he falls into a deep sleep. Yet even then the lowest, reflex level still remains unaffected. This is revealed by the fact that if the drunken sleeper's hand is pricked with a pin, the hand will be immediately withdrawn without the man awakening.

It is evident from the foregoing outline that since imagi-

<sup>1</sup> When consciousness is present, we have what is known as a Sensation Reflex.

nation is bound up with the five senses, the level of imaginative thought is more primitive than that of abstract thought, which cannot come into being until the association areas of the brain have been developed. At the lower level of imagination, action will therefore naturally follow quickly upon stimulus, for this is what invariably happens *until the inhibiting power of deliberate thought on the conceptual level leads to the possibility of a deferred reaction*. Thus we have the physiological explanation of the fact that the stirring of the imagination leads to immediate action, whereas an appeal to a person's judgment from the very nature of the case leads to hesitation and suspense.

This view of imagination is confirmed by the most extensive scientific enquiry which has so far been undertaken with a view to discovering whether there is a general 'faculty' of imagination.<sup>1</sup> In this investigation only creative imagination was considered. It was tested under two aspects, designated Fluency and Originality respectively. As a result of the investigation both these aspects appeared to be compound. "The former comprised a 'speed' or quickness factor, Memory and possibly an unknown factor called X; the latter consisted of Memory, some element common to 'Fluency', and possibly an additional and unknown factor Z."<sup>2</sup> But the significant part of the findings from our present point of view is the following: "The speed and X factors in 'Fluency', especially, seem due to the absence or diminution of inhibiting factors such as self-criticism in certain subjects, and to be comparable to the 'flight of ideas' in the manic phase of manic-depressive insanity, or the fluency of speech pro-

<sup>1</sup> See H. L. Hargreaves, "The Faculty of Imagination," *British Journal of Psychology*, Monograph Supplement No. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 63.

ducible in some subjects by slight fatigue or small quantities of alcohol.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, when the operation of the association areas of the brain is enfeebled by fatigue (which those parts of the organism latest to be evolved are the first to experience) imagination becomes more active, because it works through the lower levels and is, under the circumstances, released from the inhibitions of the higher levels.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 64.

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